NO MEDICINE FOR THE BITE OF A WHITE SNAKE: NOTES ON NATIONALISM AND RESISTANCE IN ERITREA, 1890–1940

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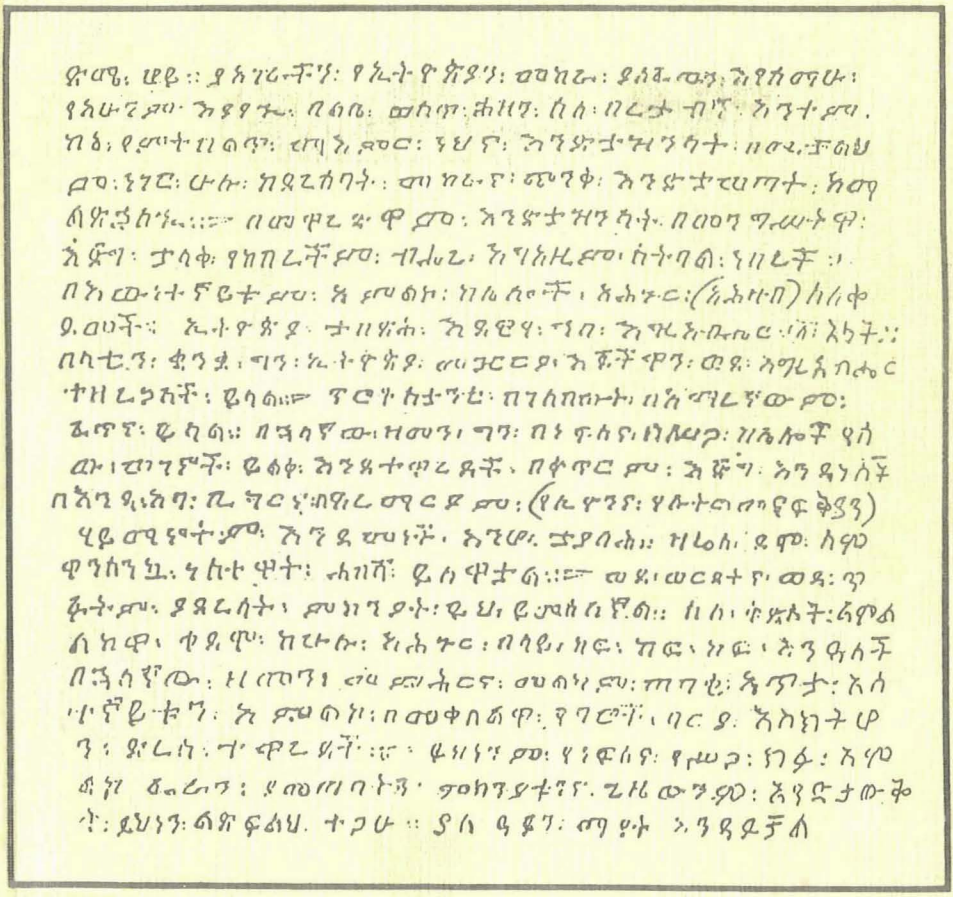

From the Memoire of Blatta Gebre Egziabeher
composed in 1889 Eth. Calender.

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Tekeste Negash

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Tekeste Negash

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PREFACE

The papers in this anthology, which are a by-product of the process of writing a doctoral dissertation on Italian colonialism, deal with the themes of nationalism and resistance more by accident than by intention. They were written at different times and for different purposes. Two main considerations prompted me to publish them in this less costly form. In the first instance, these notes are peripheral to my dissertation. And in the second instance, put together in this form, they would be more accessible to a wider public than if I were to publish them separately in specialized and, most often, inaccessible periodicals.

Based on hitherto unpublished material, the first paper challenges prevailing views on the concopts of the Ethiopian (include Eritrean) nation and nationalism. Ethiopian nationalism has either been presumed to exist or altogether denied. While political historians of the pre-twentieth century took for granted the resilience of Ethiopian nationalism, the enemies of the Haile-Salasse regime, e.g., the spokesmen of the Eritrean Liberation Fronts, went to the other extreme in maintaining that Ethiopian nationalism did not exist before the 1880's. Like other African countries, they argued, Ethiopia was very much the creation of European imperialism with all the consequences which derive from such birth. Indeed, there is some truth in the latter allegation. The expansion of the pre-1880's Ethiopia to three times its former size within a brief period of three decades creates serious methodological and conceptual problems as to the identity of the individual and the country. Ethiopia of the 1900's is geographically and ethnically different from the Ethiopia of the 1880's. Thus, for instance, the points of departure for a study of nationalism during the late nineteenth century are different from those used to examine the 1930's. Since the primary aim was to provide source material on the subject, I have organized it in such a way that both the bearer of nationalism (i.e., the individual) and the concept are treated equally. Blatta Gabre Egziabeher, through whom the subject of nationalism is being explored, wrote a 235 page Memoire in 1897 on the decline and fall of the Ethiopian State, a year after the victorious Battle of Adowa. During his brief life (1860-1914) he also wrote several short political texts. Admittedly, the views of the author, although very important can not be a substitute for studies of a more analytical nature. However, in the context of the themes of nationalism and resistance, what makes the views of the author quite intriguing is that, firstly, he wrote his Memoire while being employed by the Italian colonial state, and, secondly, he was himself an Eritrean from a well-known village a few miles north of Asmara.

The inter-relationship between the evolution of appropriate land tenure systems as a response to the rigid and inflexible burden of tribute and the spatial and political organization for the appropriation of surplus in Eritrea are the main themes of the second paper. There exists a fair amount of literature on the political organization of the Ethiopian state but hardly on the mechanisms for the appropriation of surplus. Based on field reports carried out by an Italian officer in 1893, the section on the spatial organization for the surplus appropriation provides an insight into the political discourse between the peasantry and the ruling class. As the material amply demonstrates, a most striking conclu-

sion is that the Ethiopian central state hardly intervened in the modalities of assessment and collection of tribute at a village level. Although the essay does not claim to be exhaustive, it would, I hope, enable us to pose some questions on the patterns and extent of change from the late nineteenth century onwards.

The complex dimensions of resistance and its limitations are the main themes of the third and fourth papers. That on "Resistance and Collaboration in Eritrea," published earlier in the Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies (1984) is included here by permission of the editor of the Proceedings, S. Rubenson. During the early years of colonial rule, Eritrean resitance was largely articulated by the Tigrinyans, who were the immediate victims of colonialism. Reistance was doomed to failure because the colonialists easily exploited the conflicts between Eritrean ethnic groups who before colonization had very little common political and cultural tradition. Understandably enough, Italian colonialism was perceived differently by different ethnic groups. The essay discusses the motives for resitance and its spread among the various groups.

The theme of resistance is continued in "Pax Italica" but from a slightly different point of departure. Motivated by the availability of unique source material (I refer to the Graziani papers) and the inadequacy of the literature on the subject, I attempted to interpret the organization, method and scope of resistance to colonial rule. Italian pacification policies are also give due consideration, since they determined as well as responded to resistance. I was struck by the debate this paper generated when I read it at a conference on The War in Ethiopia, 1935-1941, held last year in London. It was criticized for underestimating the breadth and scope of Ethiopian resistance on the one hand and for overemphasizing the brutality of colonial pacification praxis. I fully understand the ideological basis of the furious reactions to the "Pax Italica," because by pointing out the brutality of colonialism and the limitations of Ethiopian resistance, I believe I have initiated a process of reassessing both colonial praxis and of demystifying the notion of continuous and all-embracing Ethiopian resistance.

The review article, "Historians and Eritrean History," included here by permission of the editors of North East African Studies (published in vol. 5:1 (1983), 67-81), was initially intended to point out the misuse of historical heritage for political ends. Its inclusion in this anthology is justified on the grounds that the reader would be in a stronger position to examine the complex political and ideological motives behind historical research. On the basis of a sketchy source material, I pointed out in the review article (written in 1981) the following points: firstly, the Tigrinyans in Eritrea identified themselves with the Ethiopian state, however vaguely this state might have been perceived; secondly, Italian colonialism did not appear to have undermined this sentiment of nationalism or irredentism; and, thirdly, the attempts to legitimate Eritrean Liberation Movements through the production of new history could at best benefit the ruling elite in an independent Eritrea. Although the discovery of new material has strengthened some of the above points, a great deal of research at the local level remains to be done.

The issues of the last review article deal with the impact of Italian colonialism on Eritrean social and economic structures. Taddia's arguments, on the whole, are not only well measured but also conducted within a clearly defined variable, namely colonial impact on land tenure. While I fully concur with Taddia on the changes introduced by colonialism, I maintain that Taddia has exaggerated the extent of colonial impact. Italian colonialism hardly transformed Eritrean social and economic structures. The business of colonialism was to exploit the colonial material and human resources as cheaply as possible, and this was carried out in most cases without bringing any significant social and economic transformation in the colonies. In the case of Eritrea, moreover, the strategic (political) importance of the colony, as a staging point for colonial penetration to Arabia and Ethiopia, was given more priority than economic exploitation. The argument that colonial rule can transform the structures of colonical societies might be correct at an abstract and theoretical level. In reality, colonial rule in Eritrea only succeeded to impose a capitalist sector on top of the pre-colonial structures without bringing any structural transformations. To argue otherwise, as Gabre-Medhin (whose work is also reviewed) appears to do, would amount to a perpetuation of a myth of colonialism as a modernizing experience.

As the subtitle makes clear, no claim is made that these papers have answered many questions on nationalism and resistance. Read together, however, these papers provide sufficient material not only on the complexity of the themes but also on the manner these themes have been confronted by historians. The effort put into makig this anthology accessible would be amply compensated if some would feel provoked to either pursue the widely open field of research on the region or challenge the views expressed here.

BLATTA GEBRE EGZIABEHER GILA MARIAM AND HIS WORKS: A SKETCH TOWARDS A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY OF A NATIONALIST

By far the most neglected themes in Ethiopian political history are those of nationalism and the state. Taddese Tamrat's seminal work on Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270-1527 (OUP 1972) concentrates on the general political history of the period. The impact of the state on the Church and vice versa, the horizontal and vertical links between state organs and ordinary citizens, the ideological and mythical foundations of the society are neither systematically approached nor satisfactorily discussed. Addis Hiwet's provocative and highly interpratative study on the Ethiopian state, while ignoring completely the nature of Ethiopian nationalism, limited its analysis of the state to the policies of the ruling class that succeeded in fostering solid links with world imperialism.[1] Richard Greenfield's slightly outdated Ethiopia: A New Political History (1965) hardly went beyond providing numerous insights into how Haile Selassie regime confronted some problems of state, e.g., the coup fo 1960 and the Eritrean question in the 1940's and 1950's. The remaining standard works of Caulk, Marcus, Darkwah and Rubenson assume the resilence of Ethiopian nationalism without, however, analysing or even describing it.[2] One reason that might have hindered the undertaking of such a task could well be the incorporation of vast areas into the Ethiopian state through the expansive policies of Emperors Yohannes and Menelik. The expansion of Ethiopia to three times its former size within a brief period of three decades is bound to create serious conceptual and methodological problems. The task could perhaps be wisely approached by working out a sort of demarcation whereby the themes of the state and nationalism could be studied for each phase of Ethiopian history.

This essay, inspired primarily by the gap in our knowledge on the subject, has however an extremely modest scope. Its aim is to provide some background on the concepts and perceptions of an ethiopian with regard to nationalism and the state. It is undertaken with the conviction that more case studies on the activities and writings of Ethiopians will prove useful for historians to enable them to attempt studies of a more analytical nature. Incidentally, the essay challenges the myth of the docility of the Eritrean people vis-a-vis Italain rule made popular by Trevaskis and Longrigg.[3] It also provides some source material for an interpretation of early Eritrean history different from those attempted

by Basil Davidson and Bereket Habte Selassie.[4]

Blatta Gebre Egziabeher Gila Mariam (henceforth described as Blatta) lived from the early 1860's to 1914.[5] He was born into the lineage of Gebre Kristos in the village of Tzzada Kristian, a few miles west of Asmara. So far he has been primarily known to us as the pioneer of newspaper culture in Ethiopia.[6] His handwritten newspapers, some of which were available at the National Library (Addis Ababa), have not been studied. Nor has his 69-page monograph on the Proclamation for the Welfare of the People and Country (published 1897 Ethiopian calendar (1905)), which was probably available in Marcel Cohen's collection in Paris.[7] Blatta's surviving poems, thanks to a coincidental interest on the parts of J.I. Eadie and J. Kolmodin, were reporduced by R. Pankhurst. though with hardly any explanation as to their contents.[8] While his handwritten newspapers and his monograph still remain inaccessible, an attempt to draw a sketch of his political and literary career will be undertaken using hitherto unknown material from the Colonial Archive of Eritrea.[9] Firstly, there exists sufficient material on Blatta's early career with the Italians, on the circumstances that led to his detention and his eventual escape from prison.[10] Secondly, his unpublished 235-page long **Memoire**, which since 1899 has survived many vicissistudes, can finally be made widely accessible.[11] The **Memoire** is a document of considerable importance for the study of its author and the themes he exhaustively discusses. Thirdly, we have his considerable correspondence with dignitaries and commoners inside and outside Eritrea and in particular his draft of a letter to Emperor Menelik dated May 18, 1899.[12] Lastly, his surviving poems with their recurrent themes of unity and vigilence are worthy of re-examination.

Very little is known about Blatta's early childhood apart from the fact that he was educated at Debre Bizen, one of the ancient monasteries of Ethiopia. According to his record of employment, he joined the Italians in July 1889, a few weeks before their occupation of the Ethiopian/Abyssinian highlands.[13] To what extent and to which goal he studied at Debre Bizen is difficult to know. His command of Geez (Ethiopic) and his continued close relationship with the monastery seem to indicate that he had been tutored for a good many years. For reasons that are not clear, he terminated his official connections with the monastery and entered service with the Italians as a clerk in Amharaic. In the summer of 1890 he was promoted to the rank of interpreter and transferred to Asmara with an annual salary of 720 lire.[14] Between 1890-93 he accompanied Italian officers on their campaigns inside and outside of Eritrea. Between the years 1893-95 he was stationed in Sageneitti with an increased salary of 1260 lire per annum. During the Bahta Hagos uprising Blatta, together with Captain Sanguinetti, was taken hostage to Halai, from where he escaped before the brief battle between Bahta and the Italians. Blatta accompanied Italian forces to Tigray and was in the vicinity of Adowa at the climax of the Ethio-Italian conflict of 1895-96. By August 1896 a winner of two silver medals, was earning 1800 lire per annum.[15] It could be said that during this year Blatta reached the apogee of his power and fame. In the aftermath of Adowa, Blatta accompanied four Italian missions to Emperor Menelik and one to Ras Mekonnen.[16] As the chief interpreter he had access to delicate information from both sides. He had many occasions to exchange views with Emperor Menelik and his advisors. By virtue of his office,

unpredictable but enviable, Blatta considered himself, and was most certainly considered by others, as one of the most knowledgeable persons of his time. In 1896 Blatta had repeatedly expressed his views on how to revive and renovate the decadent Ethiopian state.[17] The following year he composed his **Memoire** on the moral and material decline of Ethiopia. Two months before his detention (May 1899) he drafted a four-page letter to Emperor Menelik, in which he addressed his emperor on behalf of the Ethiopians under foreign (Italian) rule.

It is highly possible that Blatta's fame and power were on the wane from the beginnig of 1897. After the Ethio-Italian treaty of October 1896 most of the important negotiations were held in Addis Ababa between the Italian Legation and Emperor Menelik. The boundary convention of May 28, 1900 was concluded in Addis Ababa without the participation of the colonial state in Asmara. Blatta was no longer a key figure since there were no significant Italian missions from Eritrea to Ethiopia. The Italians might also have begun to recognize that Blatta was dispensable for a variety of reasons. At any rate, in July 1899 Blatta was detained on suspicion of treason.[18] On the basis of what was revealed in Blatta's confiscated **Memoire** and considerable correspondence, he was proved guilty and shipped to a prison in Naples.[19] Several weeks later he was transferred to the detention centre at Nocra (near Assab), a prison described by the informants of Kolmodin as the "burial ground."[20] Italian material contains no record as to how Blatta reacted to the charges of treason. According to what he wrote in his **Memoire**, he considered himself as an Ethiopian residing in that part of Ethiopia under foreign rule. His loyalty to the foreign rulers did not appear to create any conflict with his Ethiopianism. What the Italians probably discovered in 1899 was not Blatta's lack of loyalty to them, but his Ethiopian nationalism, which had been clearly expressed as early as 1896.

From November 5, 1899 Blatta spent his days chained and incommunicado in one of the cells at Nocra. On November 17 the other inmates of the prison put into action a carefully devised plan of escape.[21] On the morning of the 17th there were 119 inmates guarded by 27 armed men under the command of two Italians. A group of 12 detainees were performing a routine duty of carrying water from a nearby well to the prison. They were escorted by six armed men. On a reasonable pretext, four of the gang separated from the rest and were followed by two armed guards. Then the four detainees put their plan into action and disarmed the guards, killing one in the process. The four, partly armed, proceeded immediately to take care of the remaining guards. The gang, half of which was now armed, moved quickly to the quarters of the two Italians, killed one and took the officer, G.B. Cortese, as hostage. The gates of the prison were forced open and the detainees freed. Blatta swapped his chains with the Italian hostage and preparations for escape began in earnest. A dhow *(sambucca)* that happened to be there was seized. 107 detaineed plus six guards and the hostage sailed to the peninsula of Buri. At Buri the escapees were given an expert guide and adequate provisions by the son of a chief of Bet Assa Mohamedu (Dahomeita Afar, Buri) who had also been a detainee since 1898. After an arduous jorney of fifteen days and nights they reached Enderta (Tigray). It was unlikely that Blatta inspired the plot, but the Governor of Assab wrote in his report that Blatta later assumed an important role.[22]

Blatta's movements from the time of his escape until his death in 1914 are difficult to follow. Ferdinando Martini, the Governor of Eritrea, kept random notes based on reports made to him by his consular and commercial agents. For the greater part of 1900 Blatta was in Tigray with Ras Mekonnen, despite rumours that he was on his way to Shoa for an audience with Emperor Menelik.[23] The last we hear of Blatta from Martini was on May 5, 1901 when the Italian consul at Harar reported that Ras mekonnen had elevated hime to the rank of Fitewrari.[24] Blatta was in Harar as late as 1902.[25] Between 1903-05 he was most probably in Addis Ababa, where he tried his hand at newspapers. In 1905 he published his monograph, Proclamation for the Welfare of the People and Country. Since his surviving poems were collected in Addis Ababa (1913), we might provisionally suppose that Blatta remained in the capital until his death.

His Concept of Ethiopia, the State and its Decline

With mixed feelings of humiliation and pride, blatta expounds his grand theme in the following words: "I am writing you an introduction and commentary about the degradation and distress that befell the beautiful and great Ethiopia..."[26] Addressing himself to the God-loving and God-fearing Orthodox brother, he goes on to explain why he decided to write. "The distress of our country had, entering my heart, tormented me and made me feel extremely sad, I beseech you (after reading the **Memoire**) to feel sorry for her (Ethiopia) and to try as much as you can to pull her out of her distress and tribulation. (Ethiopia) was once a very great and powerful kingdom/state and was known as the country of the Agazi people."[27] Blatta then narrates that as the first among the nations to believe in the True Faith, it was said that "Ethiopia stretches her hands unto God." However, in later centuries she had become degraded both in spiritual and material matters and had fallen far behind other peoples. "And these days." Blatta bitterly comments, "they even call her Habesh (Abyssinia), denying her true name."[28] Although Blatta states on the first page that what he is going to write will be based on what he has heard and on what he has personally experienced, his **Memoire** also contains citations and interpretations from various sources. Hagiographic literature such as the Senkssar, the various acts of Ethiopian Saints, various editions of Tarike Negast and some acknowledged and unacknowledged European material constitute undeniably his major sources for the past.

After advising his God-loving and God-fearing brother to remain firm against those who might ask him to accept Habesh instead of Ethiopia,[29] he explains the earlier territorial boundaries of Ethiopia."Ethiopia (the term) is of ancient origin."[30] "In the New Testament (the area described as Ethiopia in Genesis) is called Gihon or Ghion. This area begins from the Nile and reaches up to Egypt and is surrounded on all sides by Ethiopia."[31] Blatta then tells us that the second part of Ethiopia according to the Book of Esther stretches from India to those countries across the Red Sea, facing Zeila. In ancient times, we are told, this area used to be called Ethiopia.[32] The third part lies to the west. "It is the country of Hendace, Queen of Ethiopia, cited in the Acts of the Apostles. Nowadays this country is called Sudan. And it means blacks."[33] It can be clearly seen that Blatta's concept of

Ethiopia, largely based on the Bible and other, unacknowledged sources, is conveniently vague. Although he seems to be aware of the concept of Ethiopia as a geographical term and that of Ethiopia as a political state, it is far from clear whether he was able to distinguish between these two concepts. Later on in the **Memoire** Blatta describes the physical boundaries of Ethiopian kingdoms where the kings "ruled by power, wisdom, but above all by prayer over a much respected country which extended to the east up to Adal, to the west up to Sennar, to the north up to Upper Egypt and to the south up to Kaffa including other regions."[34] Ethiopian kings, Blatta continues, constructed buildings, erected obelisks, which he saw at Adulis, Zula, Gummaile, Kohaito, keskesse and Senafe.[35] As evidence of the greatness of Ethiopian kings, the author describes in great detail the achievements of above all Kings Abreha-Atsbeha, Kaleb and David II, who in one way or another enhanced the image of their country.[36]

With little variation the vast territorial extent of Ethiopia is once again presented, this time in order to explain the central cause of decline. "If someone should ask what has become of the descendants of Menlik I, the true Orthodox! And how the previously Christian countries became overwhelmed by the darkness of Islam, the Gallas, Lyon and Luther! The answer is that through the offence of monks and priests they adopted a false faith and thus offended their God. Now our state has disappeared completely and our people live as if they had never been born."[37]

Strictly connected with the ancient glory of Ethiopia are the questions related to the origin and continuity of the state. That the Queen of Sheba (Azieb or Makeda) was the queen of Ethiopia is taken for granted.[38] Blatta's main source is Dilbo, the chroniler of Emperor Susneos. Dilbo, according to Blatta, wrote that 800 years prior to Azieb Ethiopia was ruled by a python (Zendo).[39] On the basis of ths informatin and comparing it with the reign of Solomon (ruled 3000 after the creation of the world), Blatta writes that the Ethiopian kingdom was first formed 2200 after the creation. In other words, at the period when Solomon reigned in Jerusalem, the Ethiopian state had already existed for at least 800 years. Blatta concludes the genealogical feat by stating that he does not think that there are any other states like (Ethiopia) which since the creation of the world have been ruled by a single dynasty.[40] The only qualifications to this mileenia old dynasty were, according to Blatta, the rule of Yodit and the Zague dynasty, altogheter 365 years.[41]

Although Blatta repeatedly reminds his reader that the decline of Ehtiopia began at the turn of the 16th century with the invasion of Gran, he describes Ethiopia as rich and fertile until the reign of Emperor Teodros (1865-68). For Blatta, Ethiopia was not only rich in livestock and fertile in cereals, but resembled the biblical land from which flowed milk and honey.[42] Blatta gives an account of the kind of cereals that grew in abundance in many parts of Ethiopia and of the immense quantity of livestock that families had in their possession. He provides names and places where rich catle farmers used to bathe over and over (literally) with milk and honey. The policy of Emperor Teodros which resulted in the slaughter of 150,000 cattle is mentioned as a cause for the material decline.[43]

The invasion of Gran (1502 (sic)), though caused by a spiritual laxity, initiated the material decline of the state. Blatta does not, however, specify the nature of the spiritual factor apart from the broad statement that the monks and priests offended their God by adopting a false faith. It is only for the 17th century that Blatta provides concrete examples of decline in the spiritual sphere. "Lacking a righteous leader, the monks and priests of our country quarrelled among themselves and split into three factions."[44] Blatta then narrates that the controversy and conflict began during the reign of Emperor Fasil in 1656 or 1660 A.D.[45] When Emperor David (ruled c. 1708-13 A.D. Eth.C.), who adhered to one faction, came to power, he exterminated the followers of the remaining factions using an army known as Jewiye.[46] Since the kings, like the priests, were split into religious factions, upon coming to power they harassed those who held opionions other than their own.[47] This religious controversy appears to have lasted for nearly two hundred years until the reign of Emperor Teodros. The allegation against the monks and priests is carried further when Blatta tells his God-loving brother that he has never seen the Ethiopian religious teachers teach or preach. According to him, these monks and priests went to eat and drink on every occasion of marriage and commemoration for the dead.[48] Nor were the monastic orders spared from Blatta's incisive analysis. Many people, he writes, joined monastic orders in order to make use of the vast lands *(gult)* owned by the monasteries, especially in Tigray and Amhara.[49] Therefore the monks were not interested in the spiritual aspect of their order. Since the monks "neglected their spriritual obligation, they became greatly discredited among the people." [50]

To illustrate the material aspect of decline, Blatta summarizes Ethiopian political history since the invasion of Gran. From Gran up to 1889 Eth.C., Blatta reminds his reader, the cause of war had not ceased. "Against the kings, descendants of Menelik, rose first Gran and later the Gallas. There was no respite from war. later the Ethiopian state was destroyed when Christians rose against their kings.[51] This we are told took place in 1780 at the battle of Aferwanat between Ras Ali and Emperor Tekle Haimanot.[52] Although Blatta seems to be acutely aware that it was Ras Mikael Sehul who dealt a serious blow to the power and authority of the 'Emperor,' he does not date the complete destruction of the state at c. 1761 Eth.C. The battle of 1780 is, however, taken as a watershed in his interpretation of Ethiopian history. Blatta tells us that 109 years after Aferwanat, the fallen state had not been restored even by those who claim to be the descendants of Menelik. Thus the state was destroyed at Aferwanat and Ehtiopia split into four parts. The Ras of Begemmedir, Gojjam, Simien and Tigre became the rulers in their respective countries. However, since each of them desired supreme power, "for 67 years there was continuous war between these rebels until Emperor Teodros defeated them all." [53]

Despite the fact that nearly half of the **Memoire** is devoted to a detailed discussion of the correct faith, and despite his repeated statements that faith in Jesus and the Virgin Mary will enable the reader to overcome both material and spiritual obstacles, Blatta places the central cause for decline in the political practice of the Etiopian state. "A far greater curse than those mentioned above," Blatta writes on page 51, "a curse that spoiled and destroyed the country was the practice of billeting soldiers." Blatta:

> The governor despatches his soldiers to a specified region, authorizing them to get from the inhabitants so much in the morning and its double at night. Their leader organizes his men into groups of ten and billets a group on each house. ... Then the soldiers fall upon the region like locusts and hail. ...If the host is poor, the soldiers harass him to bring forth enough (food and drink). He (the soldier) tortures him (the host) and chains him until blood oozes from his fingertips. If the host is rich, the soldier takes his wife and brings disgrace upon his daughter. He seduces the wife from her husband and the daughter from her father. Therefore (through such abuse of power) a common soldier has a woman or someone called servant. Furthermore, each common solder has a male servant who takes care of his belongings. [54]

Blatta's account of the destruction of the subsistence economy from the mid 19th century onwards continues on the same page. "In 1882, Eth.C. there was famine. The governor ordered a collection of tribute. Each family paid a certain amount in grain or, in lieu of this, eight dollars (most probably M.T. thalers) or two cows. He who was asked to pay one or two units of tribute took out his livestock and handed them over to the soldiers." In Hamassien, Blatta heard people say that families without any means gave their children in lieu of tribute. "Out of bitterness of their distress and oppression," Blatta writes, "many youths were reduced to being soldiers and servants. Others crossed the sea, never to return. While only a few remained employed as followers of Europeans and other Christians, most of the rest became slaves to Moslems." [55]

The criticism of the Ethiopian political system also includes a brief commentary on Ethiopian diplomacy throughout the previous four centuries. On the basis of Abba Jacob's hagiography, Blatta criticizes Ethiopian kings because they too easily forgot their obligation to pay back the Portuguese for having saved Ethiopia from Gran. [56] As for the later period, Teodros' policy towards Great Britain is criticized. [57] Emperor Yohannes is held responsible for his own death and the penetration of foreign rule in Ethiopia. Blatta narrates that a French diplomatic mission warned Emperor Yohannes of the imminent danger from the Italians. The French, we are told, asked Emperor Yohannes to sign a treaty with them in order to maintain the independence and integrity of Ethiopia. By failing to conclude a treaty, Emperor Yohannes caused his own death and allowed his country to fall under the rule of a foreign power. [58]

The curse that struck Ethiopia following the death of Yohannes up to the present time, Blatta informs his reader, was like the one which fell upon Jerusalem when it was beseiged by Titus. [59] One rising after the other led to war and pillaging. The crops in the fields were eaten by locusts. The people and livestock were afflicted by epidemics and drought. People fell dead like leaves on their migration to Massawa. Those who survived became Moslems. After the death of Emperor Yohannes the Italians occupied Bogos, Hammassien, Akele Guzay and Serae. The dead they burned using kerosene. [60]

Blatta on Italian Colonialism in Eritrea

The **Memoire** was written in order to explain the moral and material decline of the Ethiopian state. It was completed in 1897. One of the reasons that motivated Blatta was that the state, that had been completely destroyed in 1780, had still not been restored by the descendants of Menelik. But did not Ethiopia expand to three times its size under Emperor Menelik? Did Menelik's regime not represent a new era of regeneration in Modern Ethiopian history, especially after March 1896? Why did Blatta feel compelled to write, one year after Adowa, on the moral and material distress of Ethiopia? The **Memoire** is not as explicit on this issue as his letter draft to Emperor Menelik in 1899. This is partly due to his background and partly to his attempt at comprehensiveness. Nevertheless, it could be demonstrated sufficiently, if not perhaps strongly, that what really motivated him to describe Ethiopia in the way he did was his perception of Italian colonialism in Eritrea. On page 49, after an exhaustive treatise on the moral and political reasons for the destruction of the state, Blatta concludes his catalogue of causes thus: "I wrote these, which are by no means complete, because I witnessed my countrymen, my brothers, my sisters and my religion daily being chained and thrown into the jaws of python (Zendo) far more rapacious than the earlier one. And I wrote this commentary so that you would lament for their plight and so that ways could be found to redeem them from their distress."[61] The 'far more rapacious Zendo' was no other than Italian colonial rule. Menelik, who in 1899 was aksed, expected and even provoked in blasphemous language to liberate 'our brothers,' could not have been the one who daily chained and imprisoned the countrymen and religion of Blatta.

Later, in the context of the decline of the Ethiopian state and while discussing the political practice of the state, the author writes that from the death of King Yohannes until 1897, the curse that fell on Ethiopia was like the curse that had struck Jerusalem with the siege of Titus. On top of epidemics that killed people and cattle, the Italians appear to have aggravated the situation by burning the dead. An incident that the author witnessed would seem to sum up the nature of the 'far more rapacious Zendo.' A *carabiniere* met an *ascari* who was in the throes of death. The *carabiniere* instructed his Eritrean subordinate in the following manner: "Since the *ascari* will die anyway, pour (kerosene) over him and burn him." Blatta, on hearing the screams of the dying man, ran to him and put out the fire. The man did not survive. Blatta then concludes, "I have never before seen such cruelty and evil."[62]

It was in his letter draft to Emperor Menelik, however, that Blatta expressed unambigiously his perception of Italian colonialism in Eritrea. The Italians were not only ruling over 'the cradle lands of Ethiopia,' but they reduced Blatta's countrymen, sons of Ethiopia, to a state of slavery far worse than that experienced by the people of Israel."[63]

Blatta and Ethiopia in 1897

In the **Memoire** Blatta has reproduced a letter which contains in brief the subject matter that he had discussed extensively with

Emperor Menelik and his advisors in 1896. This sort of summary deals with the measures that need to be taken to renew Ethiopian society. The letter is followed by an explanatin as to how his advice was received and as to why he refused to join Emperor Menelik when asked to do so. Since it is only in this letter that Blatta goes beyond explaining the causes of material and moral decline, a free translation of the said letter will prove useful in judging how realistic his measures might have been at the time. Furthermore, it would be much easier to attempt to explain Blatta's apparently contradictory position vis-a-vis Ethiopia.

'A word of advice by an Ethiopian'

Your highness,

We pray to Zurabiel the Second, who in his kindness elevated you to restore the Ethiopian state and church which were destroyed many centuries ago, to bestow upon you his wisdom.

1. It is advisable to construct war fortresses long all sides of the peripheries of your territory. When such is done, the wind of evil faith of Islam would not spread into the midst of our country. And those along the periphery who have been converted to Islam would, I think, revert to their Christian faith.

2. It would prove useful if his Highness would establish schools in all the *awradjas* and order the people to send their children to school from the age of five until they reach the age of ten. If you promulgate and implement strict regulations such as: that severe punishment will be dealt to those who do not send their children to school; that the monks and priests preach the gospel...; that the people remain firm in their respective faith, then we would willingly comply with what God has commanded us to do: Fear and respect the King, ... (we would do so) since we love our country, our monasteries, our King, and our religion.

3. Instead of ceding the markets and ports along the Eritrean Sea to foreigners, especially those of Metemma, Massawa, Assab, Djibuti and Zeila, these places ought to revert to the state (Ethiopia) and the King accordingly change the market places.

4. Most important of all, however, is to seize the above mentioned ports for harboring ships.

5. One of the most fundamental steps that need to be taken is to import technicians from Europe for the production of armaments and employ them (technicians) to teach the people mentioned in point two above. To use money earmarked for purchase of armaments through private traders as a salary to those employed. To select those brave ones with superior intellect for this purpose. And to entrust gold, silver and bronze to those technicians who culd use it better. St. Paul enjoins us to seek wisdom from those who possess it. ...Thus if your Highness could import four of five from Europe and these teach others (Ethiopians), knowledge will increase and our country will be saved from strife and misery. And your name of Emperor will never disappear from the memory of Ethiopia. ...We will continue to say, 'May God bless the soul of the King who set us upon the path of knowledge.' However, your Majesty will not succeed in achieving the above mentioned goal if you fail to make peace with the states of Europe by allowing them to establish consular services and by sending your consuls to their countries. Your Majesty, the reasons that motivated me to wirte, as I stated on page 52 of the **Memoire,** were that I saw my brothers waste uselessly and that from the days of Gran my country has been plagued with strife and misery and that this

knowledge pierced my heart and tormented me. ...says Gebre Egziabeher the Orthodox. April 28, 1889 (1897).[64]

Blatta then informs his reader that he had repeatedly talked about these and other matters with Ras Mekonnen, Ras Alula, Echege Teoflos and other high dignitaries. The King did not accept the issue of consular exchange since the court intriguers advised him otherwise: "If the King accepts consuls, the foreigners will occupy our country." But that Blatta's advice touched the King's heart is appartent from Emperor Menelik's comment to Ras Mekonnen: "The advice of that interpreter is indeed very good, only that his loyalty is not to us. Those who are with us did not advise us in the same manner. Try if you can to pursuade him to join us." Blatta, after hearing the message from Ras Mekonnen, refused, saying, "I will not go leaving my lords (the Italians), but if you do what I suggested in point five, I will come to study." Ras Mekonnen reluctantly dropped the matter.[65]

How might we explain the inconsistency between Blatta's advice as an Ethiopian and his refusal to join the service of his King? Could it be that the Italian policy of disengaging the highland areas of Eritrea from Ethiopia had begun to produce to desired effect? Neither in the **Memoire** nor in his letter to Emperor Menelik in 1899 G.C. does Blatta seem to straddle a politics of contradiction. His letter to Emperor Menelik was written by an Ethiopian to Ethiopians. His refusal to join the Emperor probably arose from exaggerated perception of his position and the political power of the Emperor. By virtue of his occupation he had access to Emperor Menelik and his advisors, which in turn might have enhanced his image vis-a-vis the population in Eritrea. Although we will never know more than what Blatta has told us about this apparently contradictory position, it could be argued that, based on his experiences in Eritrea, he wished and to some extent acted in order to commit Emperor Menelik to introducing radical innovations for the revival of the state. On a number of occasions Blatta uses the personal pronoun to either explain his motives or his understanding of certain events. There can be no doubt that he was acutely aware of the 'far more rapacious' nature of Italian rule. But in every instance where he is writing about such things, it does not appear that he was also one of those who were 'reduced to slavery by foreign rule.' The image that we get of him from the **Memoire** is that of an arbiter who protrays himself as a man deeply tormented by the sufferings of his brothers, sisters and countrymen. His high position in the colonial state apparatus, his background as a moral teacher and the respect showed to him in Eritrea and Ethiopia seem to have encouraged him to speak and write as a spokesman for an oppressed people (in Eritrea) and a backward state (Ethiopia).

Blatta, Eritrea and Emperor Menelik in 1899 (1891 Eth.C.)

In the **Memoire**, with the exception of his summarizing letter on how to revive the state, Blatta does not go beyond narrating the plight, distress and misery that befell his countrymen and Ethiopia. In 1899, however, for reasons that are not too clear, Blatta together with some unidentified collaborators wrote about his views on Emperor Menelik and his policy towards Eritrea. The letter draft is four pages long. It is rather difficult to read since

it contains a lot of additions by a person or persons other than Blatta. Most of the additions could with careful editing be worked into the text, but even then it might prove impossible to read the draft in the manner it was intended to be read by the authors. In the preamble Blatta asks the Emperor to authorize a public reading of the letter (before the King's advisors and the people) and then to deposit it in the monastery of Abune Tekle Haimanot at Debre Libanos (Shoa). The spirit, as well as the main points of the letter, will hopefully emerge from the following excerpts:

To...Ras Mekonnen, the Lord of Harar...

In the name of the Merciful God I beseech you to deliver this letter to his Majesty, the King of Kings of Ethiopia.

...King Teodros and king Yohannes, may the God of Ethiopia bless their souls, preserved their mother country with great veneration. But You, Your Majesty, have severed its integral parts compeletely.... Even though Your Majesty had power to do otherwise, You are proceeding to tear to pieces Your Mother Ethiopia's womb in the same manner as King Nero did with his mother's. Either because of incapacity or because of stupidity, You are disposing of Ethiopia as a person disposes of his urine. This process is not of recent origin. It was You, long before the death of King Yohannes, who, by establishing good relations with the *ferenjoch* (Europeans), allowed them to enter and rule in our country... .

Secondly, You have committed a far more serious offence at Wichale. ... By the Treaty of Wichale You sold Your Mother Country, Ethiopia, by authorising them to take such and such places and by delimiting boundaries for them. ...And the Europeans... moving slowly like a turtle, encouraged by the concessions that were made to them, broke the treaty and occupied the cradle lands of Ethiopia, including land rights of the monasteries. Against You, Your Majesty, they (the Italians) reached the point of stating that You, a pagan King, had no power whatsoever and that according to (our) treaty of Wichale, You were only our (Italian) protectorate. Your feeding hand got bitten.

...As You were the one who in Wichale gave lands to the *ferenjoch*, You mutilated and exterminated sons of Ethiopia, against the laws of Ethiopia saying 'Why did you Ethiopians make war against me, Your King?' ...However we mitigated (the cruelty of Your act) by reasoning thus: No matter, as long as we have a King who will redeem lost land, revive the state, who is steadfast in his word and who feels sorry for his Mother Ethiopia. ...We fools were exceedingly happy when we heard that the King of Kings of Ethiopia and his council had expressed a desire to liberate their Mother Ethiopia. Meanwhile we were ordered to facilitate the release and proper treatment of the King's white prisoners-of-war. Yet now when we inquire and examine the state of facts, what we heard has become like a dream.

It is evident that in Your reign Your thoughts are on how to destroy Ethiopia and not on how to develop it. In fact You have sold the whole of Ethiopia in exchange for money.

...You who are an ancient descendant from (the house of) David, why do You daily violate Your Mother Ethiopia? Why do You become two tongues in one person and two heads in one crown? Why

wouldn't You liberate our brothers according to Your word, or else why not appeal to Country and God? Instead of such an indecisive reign which will lead to the destructin of Ethiopia, it would be wise to relinquish Your throne to someone who could do better. Otherwise, if this year as is Your habit You sell Your country, then call Your reign Menelik the second, King of Kings of Galla and half of Ethiopia(!) To include a country (under a reign title) where You do not rule, will bring upon You the ridicule of many a people.

...Your Majesty, King of Kings, I wrote this letter not because I wanted to abuse and blaspheme God the Saviour, but because I could no longer tolerate the sadness of seeing my countrymen, sons of Ethiopia, reduced to the state of slavery by their foreign rulers (Italians), far worse than that of the people of Israel, I wanted the above account, like a sword, to pierce Your heart. Ethiopia is encircled by Europeans and if we wait for them in increased numbers and strength as sons of our single Mother Ethiopia, our God will certainly not forsake us.

Written May 11, 1891 in the city of the lost nation.

Depending on which questions one poses, a discussion of the letter draft would inevitably lead either to the nature of Eritrean resistance or to the foreign policy of Emperor Menelik. Both of these themes are, however, outside the scope of this descriptive essay. While the theme of resistance in Eritrea is being currently studied, that dealing with Emperor Menelik has fortunately been extensively studied by R.A. Caulk, H.G. Marcus, R.H.K.[67] Darkwah and not least, S. Rubenson. Seen within the context of a literate Ethiopian from the region that came to be known as Eritrea, the draft letter throws considerable light on the specific features of Ethiopian nationalism - a theme hardly studied, but too often taken for granted. The draft is extremely provocative. Its lines of argument are well articulated. Its underlying assumption that a nation is under bondage until every inch held by foreign rulers is freed, is very clear. For Blatta, Ethiopia begins and ends with the geographical area where he was born and brought up. Blatta was indeed a profound nationalist who used every means to arouse an active policy of irredentism from the King and the population at large. The massage of his **Memoire** was that since 1780 Ethiopia had never regained its former status. The message of the letter draft, far more poignant, was that Ethiopia was being continually sold to the Europeans through the policy of an irresponsible and unpatriotic monarch. As is the case with most nationalist writings, both the **Memoire** and the draft leave room for rectification. In the **Memoire** Blatta calls, among other things, for the establishment of schools, the production of armaments and military vigilance. In the letter draft Blatta calls for the liberation of Eritrea, for more military vigilance and unity as 'sons of a single Mother Ethiopia' against European encirclement.

Literary Career after 1900

A. Roberts, R. Pankhurst and the editors of the Historical Dictionary of Ethiopia credit Blatta as the pioneer of newspaper culture in Ethiopia.[68] When exactly he began producing these newspapers and what they looked like are, however, not well known.

The year 1900 as the initial year of Blatta's handwritten newspapers appears to have been been chosen for its convenience, since no newspapers have so far been cited or commented on for that year. If Blatta did indeed assume the task of editing and selling his newspaper, he could not have done it before, at the earliest, 1902. A handwirtten newspaper dated July 5, 1899 (Gregorian calendar), however, was found among his confiscated correspondence. [69] The newspaper, written in Tigrinya, contained three pages and dealt with Italian land policy in action over a period of three weeks. The Italians were in a better position to ascertain whether their detainee (Blatta) was indeed the author. They seem, however, to have taken the issue of authorship for granted, since the newspaper was found in Blatta's possession. Blatta might have inspired the unknown author to produce the newspapeer, but he did not write it himself. A glance at the style of the **Memoire** and that of the newspaper leaves no room for doubt. Furthermore, Blatta, without exception, wrote in Amharic, and since the **Asmara Gazette** was addressed to the people of Ethiopia, he would have additional motivation to use Amharic. Thus while we can be certain that Blatta did not produce the **Asmara Gazette,** we cannot be equally certain as to who the real author was. A careful examinatin of syntax and style in Blatta's considerable correspondence [70] seems to indicate strongly that the author of the **Asmara Gazette** was Kantiba Gilamikael, a close friend of Blatta, who escaped to Ethiopia soon after the detention of Blatta. Though the author of by far the earliest Ethiopian newspaper will, in spite of the circumstantial evidence, remain unknown, we can at least be on safe ground in stating that Blatta was one of the pioneers of newspaper culture in Ethiopia. A further look at the collection of the National Libarary (Addis Ababa), from which the information on early newspapers was derived, might reveal more interesting facts, not only for purposes of chronoloy, but also for the documentation of Ethiopian intellectual history.

Blatta's literary output from 1900 until hs death in 1914 is either not easily accessible or it has quite probably been left to the rats. His handwritten newspapers were, according to A.D. Roberts (1946), available at the National Library. The 1905 monograph is not signed, but M. cohen seemed convinced that it was written by Blatta. [71] Cohen's hypothesis as to the authorship of the 1905 monograph could be substantiated, or for that matter rejected, by comparing the monograph with the **Memoire.** Such a task, though by no means simple, might prove useful. Once Blatta had made his way to Harer and later to Addis Ababa, we notice a considerable development in his command of the Amharic language. He not only uses the language well, but he also uses it to express his thoughts poetically. The tigrinya loan words, which were significant in the Memoire, are non-existent in the four pieces of poetry that are available to us. Since the 1905 published monograph is not available for study, nothing of substance can be said as to its contents and its author's changing perception of the Ethiopian state. Thus an analysis of his writings after 1900, based on incomplete and randomly collected pieces of poetry, could at best enable us to reconstruct some of his ideas.

With the exception of the brief poen on 'Unity,' the remaining three pieces can be dated with greater certainty. All of the poems under study share in common the themes of unity, military vigilance and a warning against inevitable European invastion. Since

the brief poetic piece on unity, unlike the others, has not been inspired by a contemporary historical event, it could have been composed any time between 1902 and 1913. In this work,[72] employing a metaphorical language, Blatta tries to convey to his listeners the message that the reigning king should be no other than Mr. Unity. With a masterly economy of language, Blatta explains the advantages of being ruled by Mr. Unity, where the enemy will not harm and envious persons will not be many. He reminds his listeners: "Be vigilant; do not be weak. Theach knowledge, let counsel multiply. Lest we become the plaything of other peoples and the object of plunder." [73]

While Blatta was on his way to Harar, the Italians succeeded in concluding a treaty with Emperor Menelik on the delimitation of bondaries between Eritrea and Ethiopia. By virtue of the treaty of May 28, 1900, both the Treaty of Wichale and the ratification convention between F. Crispi, the Italian head of state, and Ras Mekonnen in October 1889 were rectified. Italy acquired legal possession of Eritrea, whose southern boundaries with Trigray had been rejected by Emperor Menelik since February 1893. Once in Harar and Shoa, blatta ceased to write in the manner he once did in Eritrea. He could, for instance, have used his freedom to popularize his irrenditist ideas, but instead he brushed aside the Italian colonization of Eritrea and directed his skill towards warning his nation and countrymen of the impending confrontation between the European states and Ethiopia. Was it somehow made clear to him that his part of Ethiopia was completely severed and given in perpetuity to the Italians? Or were the invisible arms of the censor hovering over his soulders? Or did he begin to appreciate Emperor Menelik's expansionist policy which resulted in the incorporation of vast areas into the Ethiopian state? From the evidence that is currently at our disposal, we can only pose such questions.

His second piece of advice was composed some time between May 1908 and June 1909 on the occasion of the designation of Lig Eyassu Mikael to the Ethiopian throne.[74] This piece, while expounding the theme of unity, attempted to achieve several aims within a limited space. Blatta begins by describing himself:

> She (Ethiopia) had a servant poor and miserable
> ...Who was longing for his death rather than becoming a slave
> ...He used to advise his fellow countrymen
> Being united, let us now reflect
> Lest like lost sheep we be for the wolf
> Before the invader comes on a swift horse
> If by science and learning we strengthen the throne...

Then he preceeds to advise his listeners that they could accept Eyassu as the will of the Emperor and the Bishop. The theme of vigilance is taken up:

> I pray thee, my country, my mother
> Who for long has never been defeated (by a foreign power)
> Lest the foreigner snatch you, be careful now.

The third poem [75] was composed soon after the Italo-Turkish War of 1911-12, in which the Turks were soundly defeated. Blatta highllighted the Turkish experience in order to warn the Ethiopians of a similar fate:

All of you hear me Moslems and Christians
...The war conspiracy that happened this year
The difficulties and the troubles that the Turk experienced
From the Great Sea to the Red Sea
They coming in ships; in battle ranks
Began to burn; with cannon fire
That they may take his country; and plant their flag
...Now one must be careful before the eagle arrives
Who snatches and takes away the bread of honor
He does not pardon the aged; or pity children
...They say he never gives a burial place
If indeed you do not believe me; look at Asmara
...If today we be in agreement; none of us being proud
Like David has told us; in the psalms of his harp
Counsel is beautiful to him who acts upon it
He who accepts it; fears no one
He will be like Japan; strong in everything.

The last piece explains the reason for the downfall of the Turkish Empire. The Turks, Blatta informs us, committed the fatal mistake of not learning the secrets that made Europe strong and powerful. This work was probably composed towards the end of 1913 and could well be his last piece. After a detailed exposition of the degenerated Turkish Empire and its inevitable defeat by the country (Italy) that had learned science, that moved freely on land, sea and air, that had mastered wireless telegraphy, Blatta shifts his emphasis to the lessons that Ethiopia could draw:

Let us then understand, since we have heard in our turn
(the Turkish fate)
And also let us notice, before our turn comes
Let us learn from Europeans; let us become quite strong
Let counsellors abound; that our mind may not be undecided
So that the enemy may not win on the day of our encounter
Let us examine history, let us read newspapers
Let us learn languages, let us regard maps
It is this which opens our people's eyes
...Lest our Mother Ethiopia divorce her husband
Let us advise her today; that she may not become a harlot
And that we, her children, may not suffer harm...

Towards the end Blatta strikes a profoundly pessimistic note:

When I always give advice; every Sunday
I found no one who disagreed with me and criticized me
Or who told me, 'it is certainly true'
And since it is so; silence is better
Since I have got no result; what use is talking
What difference does it make to a solitary vagabond like me
Woe! for whoever is accustomed to luxory [76]

Blatta's persistent call for political unity, military vigilance and economic development are based on his appreciation of a number of crucial factors. First, Blatta had since 1899 been convinced that Italy or other European states would attempt to invade Ethiopia again. The draft of the letter to Emperor Menelik concludes that the Ethiopians should remain united as sons of a single Mother Ethiopia against European encirclement. His last three pieces of

poetry consistently stress the fact that Ethiopia should be politically and militarily prepared for an eventual European invasion. Secondly, Blatta was convinced that the outcome of an eventual Euro-Ethiopian confrontation would depend on the political unity or disunity of Ethiopia. That a politically, militarily, and economically backward Ethiopia could fall prey to the claws of the eagle from overseas was certainly one of Blatta's major preoccupations from 1899 until his death in 1914.

Unlike his contemporaries,[77] who contented themselves with lamenting the backwardsness of the Ethiopian socio-political system, Blatta tried through his brief and sharp poems to outline the consequences of backwardness. For Blatta, political unity, vigilance and progress were not ends in themselves, but only instruments for the maintenance of Ethiopian independence. He was a far-sighted nationalist who warned his country and countrymen repeatedly, but in vain, of the inevitable confrontation between Europe and Ethiopia, at a time when many Ethiopians were comfortably resting on their laurels of victory at Adowa. The Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935-36 proved him right. Further study of his ideas within the context of this period and of his contemporaries might well establish his position as one of the most far-sighted and historically-minded nationalists of his era.

FOOTNOTES

1. A. Hiwett, **Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution.** London, 1975.

2. R. Caulk, "The Origins and Development of the Foreign Policy of Menelik II, 1865-1896," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, London, 1966; H.G. Marcus, **The Life and Times of Menelik II: Ethiopia 1844-1913.** Oxford, 1975; R.H.K Darkwah, **Shewa. Menelik and the Ethiopian Empire, 1813-1889.** London, 1975; S. Rubenson, **The Survival of Ethiopian Independence** (Heinemann, 1976).

3. G.K.N. Trevaskis, **Eritrea: A Colony in Transition. 1941-1952** (Oxford U.P. 1960, reprinted 1975) p. 19, p. 24; S. Longrigg, **A Short History of Eritrea** (Oxford U.P. 1945, repr. 1974) p. 135.

4. B. Davidson, "An Historical Note" in B. Davidson, L. Cliffe and B. Habte Selassie, eds., **Behind the War in Eritrea** (London, 1980) pp. 11-15; B. Habte Selassie, **Conflict and Intervention in the Horn** (New York, 1980).

5. Merab, who first met Blatta in Harar in 1902 and later in Addis Ababa in 1909, wrote that his good friend Blatta was in his fifties. Merab, **Impression d'Ethiopie (L'Abyssinie sous Menilek II)** Paris, 1929, vol. 3, p. 359.

6. R. Pankhurst, "The foundations of Education, Printing, Newspapers...," **Ethiopia Observer** 6, 3 (1962) p. 260.

7. M. Cohen, "La naissance dûne literature imprimè en amharique, 2 **Journal Asiatique** 206, 2 (1925) p. 349.

8. R. Pankhurst, op.cit.; J.I. Eadie, **An Amharic Reader** (Cambridge U.P., 1924) pp. 189-202; Among J. Kolmodin"s papers depossited at the Uppsala University Library, only two are available. Kolmodin Papers, Q15:10.

9. Soon after W.W.II, the Italians, with the permission of British military Administration in Eritrea, shipped the main colonial archive from Asmara to ROme. The colonial archive of Eritrea, identified as Archivio Eritrea (henceforth A.E.) is deposited at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

10. A.E., Pacco 419. Mercatelli, to Governor of Eritrea, Asmara, August 4, 1899.

11. A.E., Pacco 1008.

12. A.E., Pacco 935.

13. Blatta was first employed on July 3, 1889. Blatta's record of employment contains information concerning his career from 1889 to November 10, 1896. A.E., pacco 935, Stato di servizio del Signor Gabre Sghear G.M.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. "A Memoire of Blatta Gebre Egziabeher Gila Mariam from Tzzadda Kristian, Hamassien, 1889 Eth.C." (1896/97) p. 58, A.E., Pacco 1008. The **Memoire** is divided into parts and chapters. See Appendix 1 for a table of contents based on the **Memoire**'s parts and chapters.

18. Mercatelli to Governor of Eritrea, Asmara, July 22 1899. A.E., Pacco 1008.

19. F. Martini, **Il Diario Eritreo,** vol. 4, p. 377 (May 26, 1906). This information ought to have been available in the files on Blata. However, owing to the disorganized state of A.E., it has not been possible to locate it. Martini, on his way to Addis Ababa, met a former colleague and thus recapitulated in brief the circumstances for Blatta's detention and his fate.

20. J. Kolmodin, **Traditions de Tzazzega et Hazzega** (Tigrinya text, Rome, 1912) p. 258.

21. A.E., Pacco 419. Zanardi to Asmara, November 18, 1899.

22. Ibid.

23. Martini, **Il Diario**, vol. 2, p. 98 (March 19, 1900).

24. Ibid., p. 446 (May 5, 1901).

25. Merab, op.cit., p. 359.

26. **Memoire**, p. 1.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. **Memoire**, p. 12.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. **Memoire**, p. 35.

35. Ibid.

36. **Memoire**, on Caleb (ruled c. 493-523 Eth.C.), p. 33; on David the Second (c. 1365-1395 Eth.C.), p. 34; on Abreha Atsbeha (c. 306-340 Eth.C.), p. 42.

37. **Memoire**, p. 35, p. 48.

38. **Memoire**, pp. 27-28.

39. Ibid.

40. **Memoire**, p. 31.

41. Ibid.

42. **Memoire**, p. 50.

43. Ibid.

44. **Memoire**, p. 76.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid. The Jewiye were an Oromo army employed by Ethiopian Emperors. Tekle Tzadik Mekuria, **Ye Etyopia Tarik**, vol. 2, p. 239 (Amharic text) (Addis Ababa, 1968/69).

47. **Memoire**, p. 76.

48. **Memoire**, p. 77.

49. **Memoire**, p. 79-80.

50. Ibid.

51. **Memoire**, p. 50.

52. **Memoire**, pp. 193-94.

53. Ibid., p. 194.

54. **Memoire**, p. 51.

55. Ibid., pp. 51-52.

56. **Memoire**, p. 54.

57. **Memoire**, p. 56.

58. **Memoire**, p. 55. He might be referring to the LeMay mission informed Yohannes on the Italian occupation of Massawa. Cf. G.S. Zewde, **Yohannes IV of Ethiopia**. Oxford, 1975, pp. 167-168.

59. Ibid.

60. **Memoire**, p. 56.

61. **Memoire**, pp. 48-49.

62. **Memoire**, p. 56.

63. Draft of a letter to Menilek, date, May 11, 1891 Eth.C. (May 19, 1899).

64. **Memoire**, pp. 56-58.

65. **Memoire**, p. 58.

66. Letter draft, op.cit.

67. The themes raised in the article "Resistance and Collaboration ..." (see pp. below) will be further develped in a forthcoming study on Italian Colonialism in Eritrea.

68. C. Prouty and E. Rosenfeld, **Historical Dictionary of Ethiopia** (London, 1981), p. 140; R. Pankhurst, op.cit.; A. Roberts, "Documentation on Ethiopia and Eritrea." **Journal of Documentation** 1, 1(1946), p. 187.

69. A.E. Pacco 935.

70. Among Blatta's considerable correspondence (A.E., Pacco 935) exist about a half dozen letters from Gila Mikael to Blatta.

71. M. Cohen, op.cit.

72. The English translation of Blatta's poems is largely based on J.I. Eadie, op.cit.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid.

75. R. Pankhurst mistakenly stated that Blatta was inspired by the movement of the Young Turks in 1909. Pankhurst, op.cit., p. 260.

76. J.E. Eadie, op.cit.

77. Blatta's contemporaries were Aleqa Taye, Heruy Welde Selasse, Gabre Hiwet Baykedagn and Professor Afework Gabre Iyesus. While these writers were inspired by their prolonged stay in Europe, Blatta thought and wrote without such advantage. By 1914 there were about a half dozen secular works on Ethiopian society, of which Blatta's 1905 monograph, judgning by its title, appears to be the most pertinent.

Appendix 1. Table of contents of ***Memoire***

LAND TENURE AND THE ORGANIZATION OF SURPLUS APPROPRIATION ON THE EVE OF THE COLONIAL PERIOD

Introduction

By providing source material on the tenure systems and the appropriation of surplus, this essay aims to emphasize the need for a pungent type of local history research on patterns of change and social transformations of the region. In spite of its limited chronological and thematic scope, I hope it may be used as a point of departure for mapping out the historical process of the region from the 1880's until the Public Ownership of Rural Lands Proclamation of 1975.[1)]

The system of land tenure, which constitutes the first part of this study, is a fairly well covered subject. Perini (1898) , Pollera (1913), Peglion (1913), and, after the demise of Italian colonialism, Nadel (1946) have fairly extensively dealt with the matter.[2)] To this extent, the first part is recapitulative but perhaps with more clarity, on the distinctions among the various types of tenure. Nadel's study, for instance, has been relied on far too much, largely because of the linguistic medium in which it was written, although on a number of important points it is both schematic and incorrect. More recent studies carried out by Italian researchers based on a varied source material did not, surprisingly enough, deem it pertinent to point out the limitations of Nadel's other wise important contribution.[3)] Hence we are left with some aspects of the tenure system which have not yet been properly explained.

The second part of this essay is concerned with the structural modalities for the appropriation of surplus, a problem which has hardly been examined. The structures for the appropriation of surplus which the Ethiopian state evolved during a considerable period of time appear, was we shall see, to have influenced the tenure system. In turn, the tenure system seems to have limited the political parameters for structural changes of the ancient regime. A study of the organization of surplus appropriation will, I believe, provide an empirical basis for discussing the mode of production of the pre-1975 Ethiopian state, a subject timidly approached but hardly explored.

The source material for the second part is largely based on

field notes prepared in 1892-93 by an Italian officer, Rufillo Perini. His report, first published in a rather obscure periodical La rivista militare italiana in 1894, was republished in 1905 as the first part of a much larger study on the political and social history of the Eriteran highlands.[4] Although the 1905 study has been frequently mentioned as a sympathetic documentation on Ethiopian history from the perspectives of the Eritrean highlands, his study on the structural organization has not been utilized. Neither Loretta Caponi nor Irma Taddia, both of whom have written extensively on problems of land tenture in Eritrea, have made use of Perini's field notes.[5] While Perini and his works are completely absent from Caponi's extensive footnote apparatus, Taddia cites, **en passant**, one of his small articles.

Although I strongly believe Perini's detailed survey of the political and tributary organization of the Eritrean highlands to be extremely valuable documentation, I leave it to the reader to make his or her own evaluation. However, hoping that the reader would concur with me on the value of the documentation, I dedicate this preliminary study to Rufillo Perini for the thoroughness of his survey and for the respect to Eritrean oral sources which he consistently maintained throughout in his larger study on Eritrean society.

The system of Land Tenure

In 1891, one year after the organization of the Italian Red Sea posessions into a single territory, henceforth called Eritrea, the parliament in Rome sent a commission of enquiry to assess the potentialities of the colony and, not least, its potential as a colony for settlement. The commission wanted to find a prompt answer to the question of who owned the land. When asked thus, the Eritrean peasants replied that all the land belonged to the King or to the state.[6] On the basis of this ostensibly clear explanation the Italian colonizers who, by virtue of their hegemonic position over Eritrea, had assumed the role of the Ethiopian King and state, proceeded to expropriate land to be used for the settlement of landless Italian peasants. Indiscriminate expropriation led to peasant revolt and eventually to political resistance which resulted in the major re-evaluation of colonial policy.[7]

During the nineteenth century, the Eritrean highlands formed a sub-region of the province of Tigray. The inhabitants of the Eriterean highlands called their sub-region Mareb Melash. This area measured about 5500 sq.km. and might have been inhabited by about 100 to 150 thousand people. The Mareb Melash was in turn made up of five zones: Hamassien, Akele Guzai, Serae, Deki Tesfa and Deki Melega.[8] The last two zones were under the Italian colonial period (1907) incorporated into Serae.

In theory all land, not only in Eritrea of the nineteenth century but also in the rest of Ethiopia, belonged to the King or state (The distinction between King and state hardly existed in Eritrean political thought.). This concept, however, was an abstract one. To the extent that all cultivated land was liable to pay tribute under the customary norm which states that people are free but cultivated lands are liable to pay tribute, the statement that all land belonged to the King or state was correct. But the

Ethiopian state, at least in Eritrea, scarcely owned any land, although the Emperor reserved to himself a well established right of depriving his subjects of their land in exceptional cases of proven guilt of felony and/or refusal to pay tribute. The Ethiopian ruling elite, unlike its precapitalist counterparts in Europe, did not engage in the organizaion and cultivation of land. It survived solely by the appropriation of surplus from the peasantry through various means, the most important of which was tribute.

Risti Tenure

All land in the Eritrean highlands, as Pollera quite rightly perceived, was risti, that is to say, under private form of ownership.[9] The term risti originated from the Geez (Ethiopia's classical language) word resete, meaning an area that is occupied, conquered and inherited. Risti summed up a long process whereby an individual or a family sometime in the past occuped a certain area and conquered it and passed it to their descendants henceforth as an inherited property. As far as oral tradition goes, most of the Eritrean peasant villages trace their origin up to the fifteenth centruy, a period of considerable expansion of clans and sub-clans.[10] In the 1880's and well into the 1940's the main political unit of the Eritrean peasant society remained the enda, a kinship organization made up of families who trace their origin in the male line to a common ancestor. In most cases a village was made up of a single enda.

The main characteristic of the risti was that it entailed a permanent title to land, that is, ownership in the strict sense of the word,[11] but always within and under the abstract notion that all land belonged to the state or King. As the Eritrean societies evolved, risti as a concept and as a juridical term also underwent a proces of evolution. By the nineteenth century, risti was either known as risti dessa or risti tselmi.[12]

Risti tselmi is a form of ownership limited exclusively to the members of the kin organization or enda. In places where the prevailing system of tenure is tselmi, it was not only possible but also inevitable that some clans had access to more land than others depending on the viccissitudes of life. Furthermore, the tselmi system allowed for considerable variation between the land holdings of sub-clans within the same clan. Let us take a hypothetical example of the workings of tselmi tenure. Let us assume that two hundred years age an ancestor A divided his risti equally between his sons B and C. Let us also assume that in the course of time B and C formed sub-clans of A. Upon the death of B, his land was equally divided among his five descendants, while the land of C was divided between his two descendants. This meant that as early as the second generation the gransons of A might have had unequal shares of the risti of their grandfather. Already at this stage the descendants of B may have begun to feel the shortage of land. There was no other way of circumventing the progressive division of risti as neither the principle of primogeniture nor the principle of prescription was recognized by the customary laws of tenure.[13] Prior to the twentieth century, the rationing of available land among peasants may not have been threatened largely due to the periodical recurrence of drought followed by famine and epidemics. The tselmi tenure system gave rise to end-

less and costly litigation over the division and redivision of plots as the population continued to grow. To a great extent this was caused by the fact that tselmi land were vaguely demarcated both at the clan and sub-clan level. The tselmi system appeared to burst at the seams when people who lived outside for two or three generations suddently turned up and claimed their share of risti. Not only did such claims call for a sort of redistribution within the sub-clan of the claimant, but tended to affect the clan as a whole, thus making the problem of division of tselmi rist into a long drawn-out process.

We lack precise information on the spatial spread of the tselmi tenure system. however, out of the five sub-regions, tselmi was widely practiced only in Serae, the most fertile area of the highlands.

In risti dessa, on the other hand, land is owned collectively by the village and exploited equally by the dessa members who at an earlier period had enjoyed an absolute private ownership similar to tselmi. In the dessa risti, the individual peasant enjoyed a hereditary right (risti) to a plot of land for a specified number of years. 'The land fund,' to borrow an apt phrase from Dessalegn, was distributed among the members of the village periodically, usually every seventh year, with the great possibility that the peasant will get a different plot after successive distribution of the village land. Periodical redistribution was carried out by a committee of three elected by the landholding members of the village.[14] Redistribution appeared to have been motivated, firstly, by the need to eliminate som inequalities and injustices created by the process of distribution, and secondly, in order to accommodate the newly established families of the village. Explaining the origin of dessa risti, Pollera has suggested that in the old days land might have been divided equally among the sub-clans as in the tselmi system and not according to the number of claimants in the sub-clans. This system in turn might have produced two results. Firstly, since the land and not the peasant was assessed to pay tribute, it meant that the tax burden affected adversely smaller groups of the same clan. Secondly, the division of risti among the sub-clans also meant that the more fertile sub-clans felt the pressure of land shortage more than their cousins whose number, for one reason or another, remained small.[15] The push for the evolution of the collective risti originated, according to Pollera, from the demand for tribute, which, as mentioned earlier, was imposed on a well demarcated territorial unit of land and not on the capacity of individual peasants. Many decades must have ebbed away before the various sub-clans agreed, firstly, to pull together their risti and proceed to divide it equally among themselves and, secondly, to share the tribute burden according to the relative prosperity of each peasant.[16] This new system of tenure has been defined as the dessa pact. The dessa land was risti which was exploited and enjoyed equally by the dessa members who had originally enjoyed an absolute form of private proprietorship. WIth the conversion of land into dessa, the individual peasant lost his right over a plot A, but retained his right to a plot within the dessa risti or the village. The payment of tribute was equally modified by the evolution of the dessa pact. Prior to dessa, tribute was protioned out in the following hypothetical manner. Let us assume that an area A was asked to pay a tribute of 100 M.T. thallers.[17] And lett us also assume that the area A

is inhabited by five kinship groups, two of which (1 and 2) are greater in number than the remaining three. In the tselmi risti, the 100 M.T. thallers would be equally divided among the five kinship groups thus adversely affecting the kinship groups with fewer peasant members. In the dessa risti, on the other hand, a compromise solution appears to have been discovered among those sub-clans or clans who might have felt the pinch of land shortage and those who, being fewer in number, bore a heavy tax burden. The dessa pact resolved, at least at the period when it was first developed, both aspects of the problem in the sense that land was divided equally among adult peasants and tribute was shared according to the relative prosperity of individual members. At the end of the nineteenth century dessa tenure was widely practised in Hamassien, Akele Guzai, Deki Tesfa and Deki Melege. The lack of precise information notwithstanding, we can presume that the dessa tenure was more widely practiced than tselmi.

Medri Werki (land bought in gold)

In the areas where tselmi was practiced, a strictly private and individual form of ownership of land called medri werki existed. Medri werki was a field purchased from a risti owner by a third party who may or may not have belonged to the clan of the seller. This form of ownership was found in Serae, the area where tselmi was predominantly practiced. Such form of ownership did not exist in the dessa risti since the right of a person was limited to perpetual usufruct and the dessa risti was inalienable. We do not know exactly when this practice began; but it could very well have been an early nineteenth century pehnomenon. Both Pollera and Nadel agreed that merdi werki was a rare phenomenon and that after a few generations the merdi werki, through the application of the law of inheritance, became indistinguishable from the risti telmi.[18] In other words, this form of ownership evolved through time into risti tselmi.

Metayer Leases and Other Forms of Tenure

There were various kinds of leases short of absolute ownership, and a special lease, known as sedbi, contracted between groups for an indefinite period of time.[19] The sedbi system was frequently found in frontier areas where the risti lands were either threatened by outsiders or that some type of arrangement with outsiders would benefit the risti territory. In the sedbi pact, the stranger group undertook to observe certain well defined rituals as a condition for the continued exploitation of land. The sedbi pact was contracted for an indefinite period of time as long as the sedbi holder fulfilled the conditions agreed upon. The risti owning group reserved the right to evict the sedbi holder in cases where the former needed the land for their own use. The sedbi pact had some similarities to the relationship between a landlord and tenant but only in form and not in content primarily because the motives for evolution of the sedbi pact were not the need to collect dues and services but to ensure a peaceful coexistence between risti communities and expanding alien groups in the frontier regions.

The most common form of lease was the metayer form (Girat Fereka) where the risti owner provided implements and seed in

return for half of the produce. This lease was entered on an annual basis. In another slightly different variant the tenant (lease holder) provided implements, labor and seeds and thus kept two-thirds of the produce, while the remaining third was appropriated by the risti holder. The metayer lease was more prevalent in areas and in periods where risti holders for one reason or another, were unable to take care of their land. Wars and epidemics, factors which easilty disturbed the demographic balance, tended to increase the prevalence of the metayer system. In tselmi areas, peasants who had inherited relatively large plots might have resorted to metayer leases for purely economic reasons. Widows leased their land on metayer for the simple reason that women did not plough. Old people must have also resorted to this type of tenure. The metayer lease appeared to have been limited to the cases thus far mentioned. This was largely because there were not many peasants or kinship groups who possessed vast lands which could be leased for long periods on metayer basis. Furthermore, many of those who cultivated land on metayer lease were enterprising and active men who possessed the resources to add a second plot in addition to their own.

The kinship ownership of land in the case of tselmi and the village ownership in the case of dessa appeared to have worked against the institution of tenancy on a permanent basis. In the dessa areas, moreover, a stranger can after forty years of residence, if not much earlier, claim a right to a share from the village risti. His continued residence was probably taken as an indication that he felt decently treated and that the village did not have any reason to drive him out of the village territory. Sometime in the 1880's, Emperor Yohannes (ruled 1872-1889) and his appointee Ras Alula, the Governor of Mereb Mellash, decreed that any stranger who lived in a given area for a period of forty years be considered a risti holder.[20]

In dessa as well as in tselmi, fields of various sizes were set aside for priests (Girat Kahnat) for the ruling elite (Girat Goitet) and for the emperor (Girat Negus).[21] In dessa system the plots for priests were subject to redistribution with the provision that the priest or priests had the right to point out fields of their own choice. These fields were available as long as the priest or priests carried out their functions. The practice was similar in tselmi with the exception that the priest or priests could use the same plot permanently. In neither area and in no case were these plots to be inherited by the priests' descendants. Furthermore, the practice was not universal; villages resorted to it in order to attract priests, and hence plots were set aside for professionally competent people in recognition of their contribution to the spiritual needs of the community.

The plots for the ruling elite, almost invariably made up of a single family, (Girat Goitet) appeared to have been more prevalent in dessa than in tselmi. In the dessa areas where the system of equal division and periodical redistribution of land has been described as communistic,[22] the chairman of the land distribution committee and the political officer one step higher up the ladder were each given additional plots in recognition of their services. These fields remained available to the political office holders as long as they occupied their offices. Their descendants,

if they succeeded them to the same offices, would presumably continue to make use of this land. In tselmi areas, the political officers mostly relied on their fields, but some chiefs, probably copying the dessa model, compelled villages under their authority to set aside fields for them. These plots were ploughed, cultivated and harvested by the peasants and harvests delivered to the chiefs. In the dessa areas, the political officer was given one plot equal to that assigned to the peasant. In the 1940's Nadel was informed that the chief held this additional share by the grace of the villagers,[23] and that in theory, the villagers could deny such rights to an unpopular chief. With the exception of this mechanism which entitled the chief to an additional share, all land both in tselmi and dessa was owned and used by the peasantry. Tenancy in a permanent form was virtually unknown. The absence of the principle of primogeniture and the tribute system discouraged the concentration of land in fewer hands.

The fields of the emperor (Girat Negus) constituted the last of reserved fields. At earlier perids, the Ethiopian emperors either reserved certain fields or were granted fields by the peasants. By the 1880's, however, there were no fields in the Eritrean highlands exclusively reserved for the emperor. The fields of the emperor were cultivated for him by the villagers.[24] When Perini collected his data, he was informed that certain villages belonged to the emperor or, to be precise, to the imperial house.[25] Paradoxically enough, these villages enjoyed considerable latitude of autonomy both as regards administration and taxation.[26] These villages were neither inhabited by the king's servants nor did the inhabitants cultivate for the king. As peasants living in an area which once in the past belonged to the imperial house, they dealt directly with the governor of Mareb Melash, bypassing a number of local political institutions.

Finally, the gulti and gulti lands were mistakenly treated as fiefdoms.[27] By the 1880's groups of villages for historical and circumstantial reasons were put together under a political officer called shum gulti. The area under his authority was simply described as gulti. The gulti office involved obligations and privileges. On the obligation side, the gulti officer was entrusted with the administration of justice, the collection of tribute, and the levying of men in arms. His privileges were generally made up of a percentage of tribute, various prestations in kind from the peasants under his gulti, and various charges.[28] The gulti area, as it was practiced in Eritrea, was an exclusively administrative area. To illustrate this aspect clearly, let us take the political organization of one district in the Serae sub-region. The district of Tekkela was made up of six gulti. This meant that the collection of tribute and the administration of justice, etc. was carried out by six shum gulti. Each gulti was in turn made up of a number (up to thirty) of villages. The shum gulti, who was the representative of Imperial authority, might have had an additional share of land. More than this, his authority as shum gulti opened no other avenues for him to increase his possession and exploitation of land. Thus a gulti holder in the Eritrean highlands was nothing more than a political officer entrusted with the administration of the gulti area. He exercised no proprietary rights over the disposal and exploitation of land.

Organization of Surplus Appropriation

Most of the surplus generated in the Eritrean highlands was appropriated in the form of tribute. Before the introduction of Maria Theresa thallers in 1780, this yearly royal tribute (Gibri Negus) was paid in kind. Well defined territorial units called medri were assessed a fixed quantity of tribute in kind depending on the produce readily available in the area. Perini was informed that the tribute fixed by Emperor Eyasu (ruled 1729-1753) was not revised until the reign of Emperor Yohannes, who ruled between 1872 and 1889.[29] In addition to tribute, the peasantry paid a tax called fesses for the maintenance of the royal army during their sojourn in the area. Fesses was levied irregularly and villages were exempt from it as long as the king and his army were engaged somewhere else. While these were essentially the means used to appropriate surplus, the ruling elite at the local level demanded or coerced the peasantry to contribute towards the former's conspicuous consumption such as during marriages and some religious celebrations. The Church, including the monasteries and the convents, was an appropirator of surplus in its own right. Villages and medri were granted to the Church as its gulti by the Imperial hosuse. As a gulti holder, the Church collected the tribute and kept it for its own purposes.[30]

Viewed from the perspectives of the Eritrean highlands, the Ethiopian state was not a feudal state. What prevented the Ethiopian state from being a feudal society was that its ruling elite had no proprietary rights over the tribute producing land. The economic structure of the ruling elite was based on a fixed and rigid turnover of peasant surplus. The ruling elite waxed and waned with the peasantry. During the good years, the ruling elite stretched its muscles, and during bad years it suffered together with the peasantry. With permanent tenancy virtually non-existent and no real control over the land, the ruling elite depended almost exclusively on tribute for its maintenance. The Ethiopian state, in spite of its sophisticated political structures, appeared to have been more a tributary state rather than feudal. The ruling elite did not in any way organize production; it did not interfere in the tenure systems. Nor did it mobilize the peasantry to generate other types of surplus in addition to tribute. All these are characteristics which qualify the Etiopian state to be designated as a tributary state.[31]

For the purposes of tribute collection and political administration, the five zoes of the Eritrean highlands, i.e., Hammassien, Akele-Guzay, Serae, Deki Tesfa and Deki Melega were divided into medri and gulti. Medri constituted the tributary paying unit; in other words, tribute was imposed on the medri. A medri might in turn be made up of one or several gulti. The inhabitants of a gulti for historical and other circumstantial reasons considered themselves separate from those of the other gulti. A gulti in turn was made up of several villages. In practice the system worked in the following manner: Seleste wed Akele was a medri of Akele-Guzay. This medri was divided into three gulti: namely, Hadegti, Tsenadegle and Deki Digna. Tribute was imposed on the medri to be shared between the three gulti which constitute the medri. Each of the three gulti was in turn made up of a number of villages. As far as the central state was concerned, what mattered was that the tribute imposed on the medri was duly paid. The

modalities of collecting tribute from the peasantry were left to the shum gulti and the leaders of the villages.

Put in diagram form the structure for the appropriation of surplus resembled:

Table 1. Structure for surplus appropriation.

Mareb Mellash
5 Meret (sub-regions)
34 Medri
66 gulti
over 800 villages

Source: My own elaboration on the basis of Perini's report, 1894 pp. 59-67, 77-91, 91-138. The pages refer to the 1905 edition.

The structure for surplus appropriation also functined as the political structure of the old regime. The village constituted the smallest political unit. Its affairs were managed by a council of elders. Justice was administered by a judge called cika, invariably a person of long ancestry in the village. The next higher political unit, that is, the gulti, was administered by the shum gulti, a person of local origin but appointed from above. The shum gulti was politically responsible for the gulti territory. The shum gulti was in turn responsible to and under the shum medri. In cases where the medri was made up of a single gulti, the shum gulti and the shum medri were one and the same person. Depending on the political climate of the period as well as on the importance of the area, the shum gulti derived his authority either directly from the King of Kings or from the ruler of the sub-region, e.g., Hammassien. Table 2 below attempts to explain the structural links between the spatial organization for surplus appropriation and the political institutions.

Table 2. Structural links between spatial organization and political institutions.

Spatial organization		Political institution
Mareb Melash	ruled by	Korach (a governor)
Meret (sub-region), e.g., Hamassien	-	Shum negarit
Medri, e.g., Shewate Anseba	-	Shum medri
Gulti, e.g., Melazzanai	-	Shum gulti
Adi (village)	-	Shum Adi (Cica)

Source: My own elaboration on the basis of Perini's 1894 report.

Invariably, these officers were also given military and civil titles.

There were three notable exceptions to the structural links delineated above. Firstly, villages might have acquired the status of wiste gulti (gulti within a gulti). Such status was granted by the King of Kings. The tribute for such villages was fixed by the King and these villages enjoyed much wider autonomy since they were not answerable to the shum gulti and the shum medri. For legal and other disputes, they resorted to the shum negarit, the imperial appointee of the sub-region. The wiste gulti villages were treated as favoured ones, and many other villages aspired to achieve such status. [32] Secondly, for one reason or another, some villages instead of being organized as gulti, were treated as autonomous entities and dealt separately with the shum negarit. These villages were also exempt from providing services to the shum gulti and the shum medri. The third groups of exceptional village were those which paid their tribute to the local church or most often to the monasteries of the region. It is probable that the members of the monasteries once cultivated the land themselves. During the nineteenth century, however, the rights of the church over the land were similar to the rights of the King of Kings, i.e. by and large limited to the appropriation of tribute.[33]

During most of the nineteenth century, Mereb Mellash was ruled by two related clans of Hazzega and Tsazzega.[34] The rulers of Mareb Melash had always derived their authority directly from the Ethiopian emperor ever since the foundation of the city of Gondar as the Imperial seat in the beginning of the seventeenth century. This practice was interrupted during the nineteenth century, a period known as the Era of Princes and characterized by the growing autonomy and independence of the provinces vis-a-vis the Imperial state. During this latter period, the rulers of Merab Mellash were appointed by the rulers of the province of Tigray.[35] The following table attempts to reconstruct, solely on Perini's data the territorial organization and the amount of tribute levied on each medri during the reign of Emperor Youhannes the Fourth who ruled between 1872 and 1889.[36]

Table 3. Spatial Organization and Assessment of Tribute.

Hammassien

medri	gulti	villages	tribute in M.T.
1. Shewate Anseba	7	26	750
2. Dembezan	1	17	750
3. Carneshim	1	16	1500
4. Deki Ato Teshim	3	22	1500

The village of Abeito was autonomous, i.e., paid its tribute separately. Half of the tribute was paid by the gulit of Deki Ato Teshim, while the rest was shared by the remaining two gulti.

5. Lamza	autonomous	7	122

Each village paid tribute separately. The village of Ad Ecche maintained the local church in lieu of tribute.

6. Kebesa Ciwa	autonomous	11	158
7. Loggo Ciwa	autonomous	38	1200

This medri was divided into two separate areas. Addi Gheda was a property of the Ethiopian King granted to his daughter in the beginning of the 17th century.

8.	Wekerti and Saharti	1	10	500
9.	Liban	1	2	500
10.	Seffaa	1	11	700

During the second half of the 18th century this medri, according to Perini's informants, paid tribute equivalent to 500 M.T.

The wiste gulti of Hammassien

village	gulti of	tribute
1. Asmera	Deki Ato Teshim	50
2. Bet Mekka	Deki Ato Teshim	5
3. Ad Abeito	Deki Zerai	each adult paid separately in kind
4. Adi Bidel	Deki Zerai	20
5. Hamase	Deki Zerai	12
6. Ad Nefas	Karneshim	30
7. Adi Keshi	Lamza	30
8. Addi Gheda	Loggo Ciwa	-
9. Merhano	Lamza	30

Akele Guzay

medri	gulti	villages	tribute
1. Seleste wed Akele	3	21	1000

The gulti of Deki Digna made up of five villages was tributary to the church of Tsion at Aksum.

2. Deguzai	5	56	1000
3. Egela Hames	3	19	1500

The villages of Godeiti and Adi Ghena were tributaries to the convent of Debre Bizen in Hammassien.

4. Egela Hatsin	1	12	750
5. Tedrer	1	16	750
6. Mereta	2	25	750
7. Shimezana	2	43	500
8. Akkran wed Akele	1	13	200
9. Meshal wed Akele	1	38	500
10. Loggo-Sarda	1	13	750
11. Deghien	2	11	20
12. Ambesset Gheleba	1	15	

Tributary of the convent of Debre Libanos.

The wiste gulti of Akele Guzai

village	medri
1. Ashira	Deguzai
2. Tseda	Deguzai
3. Messiam	Deguzai
4. Asmaguagui	Tedrer
5. Enda Abba Shigundo	Tedrer

Serae

medri	gulti	villages	tribute
1. Tekkela	6	128	8400
During Perini's visit most of the villages were abandoned due to epidemic and the famine of 1888-1892.			
2. Mai Tsada	10	58	3000
3. Meraguz	2	54	3000
4. Gundet	1	35	600

The wisti gulti of Serae

village	medri
1. Mai Harmaz	Tekkela
2. Addi Tsadi	Tekkela
3. Addi Bari	Tekkela
4. Addi Manna	Tekkala
5. Addi Garna	Tekkala
6. Addi Anesso	Meraguz
7. Addi Kusmo	Mai Tsada
8. Addi Ancerti	Mai Tsada
9. Addi Wotolek	Mai Tsada

Perini noted that the last three villages were abandoned.

Deki Tesfa

medri	gulti	villages	tribute
1. Medri Severe	1	34	1200
2. Dembelas	2	24	600
3. Deki Taes	1	12	600
4. Accolom	1	29	1200

The wisti gulti of Deki Tesfa

The village of Mai Leham, located within the gulti of Meraguz, Mai Severe, and Demblas Tahtai, paid its tribute directly to the Imperial treasury.

Deki Melega or Cohain

Medri	gulti	villages	tribute
1. Deki Demas	4	62	

During the reign of Emperor Eyasu the Second (ruled 1729-1753) the entire region of Deki Melega paid a tribute in kind equivalent to 2000 M.T.

2. Deki Ghenzai	1	38	
3. Aila	1	8	

4. Enda Abba Yonas - a medri organized neither as an autonomous unit nor as a gulti, it was instead available to all the peasants from the region of Deki Malega.

Concluding Remarks

We do not know the criteria used by the Ethiopian state in the assessment of tribute. The relative prosperity of the medri, we presume, must have been taken into consideration. Otherwise it would be difficult to explain the different amounts imposed. But we know quite well, as Perini has been informed a number of times the division of the tribute burden. The first was at the gulti level. Once a medri was assessed a fixed sum as tribute, the leaders of the various gulti reached an agreement among themselves as to the share of each gulti. This meant that in a medri with four gulti, for instance, the tribute might be shared in such a way that some would pay more than the others. The second level of further breaking down the share of the tribute burden took place also at the gulti level. Once a gulti was assigned its share, the representatives of the villages negotiated how much each village was to pay. The third level occurred at a village level where the council of elders further assessed each peasant for his share of the tribute according to his relative prosperity. In the dessa risti mentioned earlier, some peasants would have paid more than the others depending on their relative prosperity. While the assessment of tribute on the medri level could well have been arbitrary, its collection from the medri downwards, appears to have been carried out in a democratic and egalitarisn manner. The same principle appears to have applied in the collection of fesses (for the maintenance of the imperial army during its sojourn in a medri). Thus at the best of times and during periods of political stability, as far as we can read from Perini's account, the tribute burden appears to have been of tolerable mangitude. This was even more true since the role of the central state was highly limited to the fixing of a certain amount of tribute at the medri level and hardly intervened in the modalities of assessment and collection at the gulti and village levels. As long as the medri paid its annual tribute, the villages within a gulti and the gultis within a given medri could count on carrying out their lives with minimum interference from the central state.

FOOTNOTES

1. Dessalegn Rahmato in his study on **Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia**, 1984, pp. 52, 55-56, summed up the land reform as distributive reforms based on a fixed but increasingly diminishing rural land asset. The change brought about by the agrarian reform of 1975 took the form of minor adjustments of holdings and accomodation of previously landless peasants. Moreover, instead of controlling fragmentation of plots, the 1975 reform has, in fact, made fragmentation "a permanent feature of the new agrarian structure." (p. 63) This study on systems of tenure prevalent during the late 19th century would, I hope, enable us to pose at least two questions: firstly, what were the patterns and the extent of change which gave rise to the proclamation of 1975? Secondly, how different is the reform of 1975 from the tenure systems discussed in this essay?

2. R. Perini, "Sulla proprieta fondiaria nel Serae," **Nuova Antologia** 45 (1983): 3, pp. 664-693; V. Peglion, et.al., **La colonia Eritrea: condizioni e problemi**, Rome 1913; A. Pollera, **Il regime delle proprieta terreira in Etiopia e nella colonia Eritrea**, Rome 1913; S.F. Nadel, "Land Tenure on the Eritrean Plateau," **Africa**, 21 (1946): 1, pp. 1-21.

3. Nadel, op.cit.

4. R. Perini, "Zona di Asmara: circoscrizione storica," **Rivista Militare Italiana**, (1894), pp. 1-121; **Di qua dal Mareb**, Florence, 1905, pp. 13-143.

5. L. Caponi, "Questioni agraria e questione nazionale in Eritrea, in Etiopia e in Somalia," **L'Altra Africa** 1(1975), pp. 25-53; I Taddia, "Le trasformazioni della proprieta terreira nell'altopiano eritreo in periodo coloniale, 1890-1940"; A.M. Gentili, et.al., **Africa come storia**, Milan, 1980, pp. 275-292.

6. R. Dezerbi, **L'Inchiesta sulla colonia Eritrea**, Rome, 1891, p. 62.

7. See pages 43 to 45 below.

8. Perini, **Di qua dal Mareb**, p. 51.

9. Pollera, op.cit., p. 9.

10. J. Kolmodin, **Traditions de Tsazzega et Hazzega**, Stockholm 1913; S. Longrigg, **A Short History of Eritrea**, Oxford 1945.

11. Nadel, op.cit., p. 6.

12. Ibid.

13. Pollera, op.cit., p. 8.

14. Ibid., pp. 14-15; Nadel, op.cit., p. 12.

15. Pollera, op.cit., p. 9.

16. Ibid.

17. The M.T. (Maria Theresa) thaller, a silver coin of real value, was first introduced in 1780. M.T. thaller soon became the main currency of the Red Sea region. The M.T. thaller, exchanged for its intrinsic mineral value, remained the most stable currency until the end of the Second World War. In the 1890's one U.S. dollar was worth four M.T. thallers.

18. Nadel, op.cit., p. 11.

19. Pollera, op.cit., pp. 32-34.

20. Nadel, op.cit., p. 18.

21. Pollera, op.cit., pp. 24-29; Nadel, op.cit., pp. 20-21.

22. Nadel, op.cit., p. 20.

23. Ibid.

24. Pollera, op.cit., p. 25.

25. Names of villages are listed on pages 31-34..

26. Perini, "Zona di Asmara...," p. 58; Pollera, op.cit., pp. 17-23.

27. Cf. Nadel, op.cit., p. 20.

28. Perini, "Zona di Asmara..." p. 48; Pollera, op.cit., pp. 17-23.

29. Perini, ibid., p. 58.

30. Ibid., p. 59.

31. Cf. S. Amin, **Class and Nation. Historically and in the Current Crises**, 1980, pp. 46-70.

32. Perini, "Zona di Asmara...," p. 30; Pollera, op.cit., pp. 23-24.

33. Perini, ibid., p. 53; for the latter period, see Rahmato, op.cit., p. 19.

34. Perini, **Di qua dal Mareb**, pp. 34-35; Longrigg, op.cit., pp. 73-87.

35. The table is compiled form Perini's report, "Zona di Asmara," (1894) and included in his larger study **Di qua dal Mareb** published in Florence in 1905. On Hammassien, pp. 59-67; on Akele Guzay, pp. 77-91; on Serae, pp. 95-118; on Deki Tesfa, pp. 118 -130; and on Deki Melega, pp. 130-138.

36. According to the informants of Perini, the reign of Emperor Esayu the Great (ruled between 1729-1753), was a period of justice and political stabiliby. Perini, **Di qua dal Mareb**, p. 34.

RESISTANCE AND COLLABORATION, 1882-1914

Although colonial rule has come and gone, and a fair amount of literature on African resitance has already been produced, there are several compelling reasons why African reactions to colonial rule need to by examined closely. The theme of resistance is largely based on the notion that oppression (colonialism) breeds resistance.[1] That of collaboration on the other hand is rooted in the technological superiority of Europe and in the modernizing (civilizing) aspect of European colonialism.[2] No attempt has been made to demonstrate, firstly, the synonymity between oppression and colonialism, and secondly, the implied allegation that colonialism is nothing else but oppression. Likewise, no proof has been forthcoming to show that no other alternative to colonialism was available for modernizing Africa. Furthermore, the tendency among historians to view African reactions as either those of resistance or of collaboration has resulted in two sharply divided historiographic camps.[3] A fresh study into African reactions might contribute towards a more coherent historiography.

Any study of African reactions, be it at the local level or at the regional level, has to develop a viable framework in at leas three areas. Firstly, key concepts, such as resistance and collaboration, need to be clearly defined. Secondly, the African setting on the eve of colonization and throughout the period of study need to be closely kept in consideration. And thirdly, an attempt should be made to re-examine the concept of colonialism.

While the African setting and the concept of colonialism will be discussed in greater detail later, the concepts of resistance and collaboration will be defined now. Unless otherwise specified, resistance is understood as a political concept. It is for our purpose defined as any organized collective or individual action against the presence of an alien political power, with the express objective of freeing the region, locality or village from such outside domination.[4] Protests and rebellion against specific political and economic policies of colonialism, important as they might be, need to be excluded. A series of protests might lay the ground for later resistance activities and thus determine the course of resistance. They should, however, be distinguished from resistance since both activities may not necessarily have the same goal.[5] In order to explain the intensity of the organization and the de-

gree of participation, such terms as 'elite resistance' and 'mass-based resistance' could be useful. Defining collaboration poses several difficulties. In addition to the need to distinguish between economic and political collaboration, there is also the possibility of cases where collaboration may not have been freely given. On the basis of R.E. Robinson's thesis, however, collaboration might be defined as the compatibility of economic and political interests between European and African political economic systems. This form of economic collaboration could at least in its initial phase be described as 'rational economic collaboration'.[6)]

As the process of shaping and reshaping the colonies in the interests of the imperial power continued, colonial rule concentrated on eliciting collaboration and diffusing resistance. In this process, imperial manipulation determined the form of response. Hence it could be described as 'coerced collaboration.' A detailed study of the period through the use of oral tradition and colonial policy might show the nature and degree of coercion and the manner in which collaboration was elicited. The antagonism between various African social formations that were lumped together into territories might have encouraged some societies to collaborate with the colonial power in order to protect the interests of the primordial group. This from of collaboration could be described simply as 'political collaboration.' Finally, colonial rulers have always used individuals or outsider groups to strengthen their rule and to control resistance. The role of these collaborators appears to be similar to that of the mercenaries of our time. Although they might in some cases have been useful, their role has been uduly exaggerated.

Eritrea on the Eve of Colonization

Although Italy's colonization of the Red Sea coastlands began in 1882, it was in 1890 that its possessions were consolidated into a political entity known as Eritrea. These possessions amounted to about 119,000 sq. km. Geographically, Eritrea can be divided into four zones. The highland plateau - an extension of the Abyssinian/Ethiopian highland topography - covers about a fourth of the total area. Located in the central, south and southeastern part of the colony, the plateau constituted one of the most strategic areas. Most of the colonial activities were centered around the plateau, partly owing to its temperate climate and its potential for agricultural development. To the north and the northwest of the plateau lie the coastal belt and the western lowlands. The western lowlands were once (probably on the eve of colonization) a savanna region which extended to the Sudanese lowlands. The Danakil region begins a few kilometres south of Massawa and extends all the way to Djibouti. Inland, it includes large areas of Tigray and reaches up to Wollo province in Ethiopia. The fourth region, commonly described as 'pendici orientale' is that narrow strip of land (c. 300 km. long and c. 35 km. wide) between the coastal belt and the highland plateau. Despite the fact that this region enjoys two rainfall periods per year, its usefulness for permanent settlement was greatly limited because of malaria.

Ethnically, Eritrea was inhabited by at least nine distinctive groups. These could be roughly divided into three socio-economic formations. Among the settled agriculturalists were the Baria, the

Kunama and the Tigrinyans. The semi-pastoralists were the Bogos, Habab, Mensa, Marya and the Saho. The pastoralists were the Beni-amer, the Hadendowa and the Afar. While the demographic and economic history of the region still remains to be written, a certain degree of antagonism between these socio-economic formations can be clearly discerned.

At the local level, the political organization of most of these ethnic groups provided ample ground for antagonism. The Habab, Mensa, Marya and Bogos, the Beni-Amer and the Afar were divided into ruling and serf (or vassal) castes.[7] With the exception of the Afar, the ruling castes were originally foreigners or outsider groups who succeeded in imposing themselves on the autochthonous population. The Saho, Baria and Kunama constituted what political anthropologists describe as chiefless societies since they lacked both chiefs and ruling castes.[8] Among the Tigrinyans, political relations were more complicated. The Tigrinyan society exhibited several fuedal characteristics.[9] There has always been an aristocracy, but in most cases aristocratic privilege was earned through military valour and not inherited. In theory, the land belonged to the emperor, whose power and authority depended upon his military prowess. But in practice and in custom, the land belonged to the peasants. The essence of aristocratic power lay in its ability to extract surplus from the peasantry through various types of tribute. The absence of an established and self-perpetuating aristocracy appears to be the main weakness as well as the main strength of the Ethiopian (Abyssinian) policy of the nineteenth century. While the struggle for succession led to political chaos, access to political power remained open to practically anyone with political and military ingenuity.[10] The concept of Ethiopian unity throughout the last six centuries was kept alive by the Orthodox Church. In periods of peace, relations between the aristocray and the peasantry appeared to be tolerable. It tended to deteriorate during prolonged conflicts for political power. This was largely because the peasantry was expected to provide men and provisions in support of claimants. Thus int was rare during the conflict-ridden 19th century for the peasantry to find peace and security.

At the regional level, the lands of the semi-pastoralists (i.e., the Saho, Bogos, Habab, and Marya) were encroached upon in the north and northwest by the Beni-Amer and in the south and southeast by the Abyssinians. In search of better pasture, the Beni-Amer fought intermittently against the Baria, Kunama, Bogos, Habab and Marya. The Tigrinyans sometimes at the local level and at other times led by the Ethiopian emperors, forced themselves upon the Saho, Habab, Marya, Baria, Kunama and the Bogos in order to expand their territories and to collect tribute.

The decline of central authority at Gondar created favourable conditions for the emergence of Tigray, and the revival of the Red Sea trade [11] further enhanced its power. During the 1872-1889 period, the political power of Tigray extended to all the Abyssinian regions in Ethiopia. This Tigray hegemony was, however, short-lived. Moreover, Tigrean hegemony brought about direful consequences for the peasantry of northern Ethiopia. Between 1870 and 1889, northern Ethiopia was threatened, first by Egyptian invasion, later by Mahdists from northwestern Sudan and finally by Italian imperialism. Emperor Yohannes was compelled to keep a standing

army far too long in Tigray and parts of Eritrea.[12] Since the army ahd to be fed and partially equipped by the nearby population, its prolonged stay virtually ruined the subsistence economy of the peasantry. In particular, the population of northern Eritrea (the Habab, Bogos, Kunama and some of the Saho) suffered by the struggle between Ethiopia and its enemies to incorporate them. These peripheral regions had for the most part been outside the rach of the central authority. Their proximity to the new political power in Tigray brought them into direct contact with a political system that demanded more than it could offer in terms of peace, security and development. By the late 1880's the economic chaos prevailing amongst the peasantry in the whole area was about to be translated into political rebellion. Northern Ethiopia had become extremely vulnerable to external encroachments.[13] The great famine of 1888-1892,[14] that was initially caused by an unknown cattle disease, further deepened the degree of vulnerability. Tigray was on the verge of a deep political and demographic crisis.[15]

Reactions to Italian Colonialism: Reistance

Initial Armed Resistance from Ethiopia

Whereas the Italian occupation of Assab in 1882 provoked hardly any Ethiopian reaction, the occupation of Massawa was clearly perceived as a threat. It was apparently clear to Emperor Yohannes that the aim of Italy was to expand into the highlands of Ethiopia.[16] Since the British-inspired and guaranteed Ethio-Egyptian boundary treaty of 1884 had restored all the hinterland of Massawa to Ethiopia,[17] conflict between the expanding Italian imperialism and the Ethiopian state seemed inevitable. Northward expansion along The Red Sea coastal belt into the Habab, Hadendowa and Beni-Amer region remained a possibility. However, as these regions were not suitable for Europeans, no attempts was made in that direction. In October 1886, Gene, the Italian commander occupied Saati, ostensibly in order to keep open the caravan route to the Sudan. Ras Alula, the Ethiopian governor of the northern region, sent an ultimatum demanding the immediate withdrawal of Italian forces. There was no dispute as to the Ethiopian sovreignty at Saati. On January 25, Ras Alula came with a force of about 10,000 men to Saati and launched an unsuccessful attack. Failure to evict the Italians from Saati was compensated the following day when the forces of Ras Alula ambushed and wiped out a reinforcement force of 500 Italians at Dogali.[18] Following this 'massacre', Saati was abandoned by the italians.

The implications of the Dogali incident were far-reaching. In Rome, the protection of 'national honour and dignity' called for military revenge. Parliament voted the necessary funds and Di San Marzano was despatched with some 15,000 men to reoccupy Saati. In Massawa, Italy declared a state of war and sealed the port - the main outlet for North-Ethiopian trade with the outside world. Moreover, viewing northern Ethiopia as an enemy territory, the Italian administration at Massawa launched an active policy of undermining the political base of the Emperor by providing support to dissident elements.[19]

Unknown to the Italians, however, the hegemony of Tigray, as previously noted, had begun to wane. Following Emperor

Yohannes' failure to attack the newly reinforced Italian garrison at Saati in March 1888, the power of Tigrean hegemony declined rapidly. By the end of the year, an Ethiopian threat to the Italian presence at Saati had virtually ceased. Moreover, the emergence of Shoa as the centre of the Ethiopian empire appeared assured after Menelik, King of Shoa, had successfully resited Yohannes' attempt to subjugate him.[20] The highly impoverished and blockaded northern region lost its hegemony completely when the followers of Yohannes (who had died in battle at the hands of the Mahdists in March 1889) failed to produce a unified leadership. Heavily weakened by the political and demographic crisis, Tigray was unable to resist Italian expansin into the highly coveted highlands of Eritrea.[21]

Resistance within Eritrea: Elite Resistance

Since the Tigrinyan areas of Eritrea were considered as territories acquired by conquest, the Italians proceeded to eliminate those chiefs whom they suspected of either desertion or resistance. Between August 1889 and December 1890, the Italians killed about a dozen chiefs together with some 800 of their followers[22] on the grounds that they were likely to challenge Italian authority. Livarghi, who made the disclosure of what later came to be known as the 'Italian genocide in Eritrea,' did not state that these chiefs had offered any resistance. In this process of ruthless pacification, the Italians used Adem Aga and his band from the Saho.[23] Those chiefs who were not eliminated on the spot were detained at Nocra, near Assab, and many of them died in prison.[24] Kolmodin, one of the earliest to record the oral history of the Abyssinians in Eritrea, was told that the Italians succeeded in their pacification policy without arousing any alarm amongst the peasantry since many sought collaboration with the new rulers.[25] Only three notable chiefs, Dejjach tesfumariam of Serae, Dijjach Bahta Hagos of Akele-Guzay, Blatta Beraki of Asmera, survived the initial Italian pacification. By the end of 1890, it had become clear to those Eritreans who, owing to their position in society, might arouse the suspicion of the colonial state that the only alternative available to them was to cross the border into Tigray and continue their acts fo resistance from there. Of these there were many; here there is space for only the most notable.

The persistent resistance of Aberra is vividly recounted by Kolmodin. Aberra from Hammassen was probably one of the few surviving chiefs who hoped to remain in his country by collaborating. In February 1892 a rumour spread that Aberra was suspected of opposition to Italian rule and would soon be detained. Instead of either fleeing or going into hiding, Aberra gathered his men and waited until an espeditionary force was sent to capture him. Luckily, he defeated the 100-men expeditionary force, killing their leader, Captain Bettini, and then went into hiding in Asmara.[26] Only after an extensive search to capture him had failed and the authorities had lost hope of tracing him, did Aberra gather some of his followers around him and leave for Ethiopia. An inspiring hero for the people of Hammassen, Aberra was given audience by Emperor Menelik. The Emperor, after hearing the story, is alleged to have said: "Rather than a thousand Amhara, a single Aberra." Menelik elevated Aberra to the position of Dejjach in the Ethiopian army.[27] Later, during the battle of Adwa in March 1896, Dejjach

Aberra played an important role in disrupting enemy communication lines. Unsuccessful in freeing his country from the Italians, Aberra lived the rest of his life in Shoa.

Although there is little mention of Aberra in Italian sources after 1896, they had a good deal to say on Muhammed Nuri and Gebremedhin Hagos.[28] Apart from the fact that Nuri originated from the Assaorta ethnic group, no further biographical information is available on him. We come to know of him as the famous brigand.[29] Gebremedhin Hagos on the other hand was well known. He was the son of Bahta Hagos, who in 1894 organized the most notable mass-based resistance in Eritrea. After the collapse of the 1894 resistance, Gebremedhin escaped to Tigray. Between 1896 and 1904, he repeatedly tried to persuade the rulers of Tigray to assist him in the war against the Italians. A deeply divided Tigray was, however, in no position to entertain his plea. Although Gebremedhin enjoyed a high reputation and respect as the son of a martyr, he did not worry the colonial state as much as Nuri. Nuri made occasional excursions into Eritrea and harrassed the movement of the colonial army. Sometime between 1889 and 1891, Nuri asked the permission of Ras Mekonen, the governor general of northern Ethiopia, to assassinate Ferdinando Martini, the colonial governor at Asmera,[30] a request that was, perhaps wisely, denied. In early February of 1903, Nuri was temporarily detained at Adwa by dejjach Gebre Silasse - an Ethiopian ally of the Italians in Eritrea with whom an extradition treaty had been agreed. Martini, citing the provisions of the agreement, asked for the extradition of Nuri. Nuri's reputation and his alliances in the Ethiopian political system were so established that Gebre Silasse refused to extradite him without express authorization of the Emperor. In the summer of 1903, according to Martini, Nuri joined the small band of Gebremedhin and appeared to settle in the vicinity of Senafe.[31] We do not know the extent to which Nuri and Gebremedhin succeeded in inspiring the continuous desertion of small bands from Akele-Guzay and Serae, which was significant during the governorship of Martini. On June 30, 1900, Martini noted in his diary that desertions and small armed confrontations with the colonial army were the daily menu (*il menu quotidiano*) in Eritrea.[32]

Another notable example of elite resistance is that of Kantiba Gilamikael of Godait and Blatta Gebre Igziabiher of Tzada Kristian both employed by the colonial state. Gilamikael and Blata Gebre Igziabiher were articulate writers who left a considerable amount of material on Ethio-Italian relations in general and Italian colonialism in particular.[33] Towards the end of 1899, while Gebre Igziabiher was detained, charged with treason, Gilamikael escaped the net by fleeing to Ethiopia where he ended up as mayor of Dese.[34] Gebre Igziabiher had the good fortune to be in prison at the time when some of the Nocra prison inmates put into action a well-planned plot of escape. The prisoners at Nocra (near Assab) disarmed their guards, killed some, took the Italian officer in charge hostage and travelled fifteen days and nights to their destinatin in Inderta, Tigray. Out of the one hundred and nine detainees that made their way to Tigray, thrity-one were described by teh Italians as political prisoners, and only twelve of all the escaped detainees returned to Eritrea. Blatta Gebre Ibziabiher proceeded to Addis Ababa where he continued to write on the themes of Ethiopian unity and military vigilance against foreign invasion.[35]

These isolated acts of resistance represented the reaction of a fraction of the traditional elite whose privileges had been infringed. Early pacification was primarily aimed at the selection of loyal collaborationist elites. Selection through elimination was swiftly accomplished, as the informants of Kolmodin rightly perceived, since the pacification did not effect the peasantry.[36] The Italian economic policy of the 1890-93 period further weakened elite resistance. As earlier noted, the prolonged presence of the royal army in parts of Eritrea, followed by drought and subsequent famine, had aggravated the conflict between the traditional elite and the peasantry. On the political level, the ruthless elamination of the elite reduced their number and their capability both to exploit the peasantry and to resist colonial rule. Moreover, the law and order measures of the colonial administraiton transformed collaborationist elites into salaried employees of the colonial state. These elites were effectively controlled through an administrative apparatus which was open to complaints from the peasantry. The economic practice of the colonial state also contributed to the indifference of the peasantry to the isolated acts of resistance by the elite. Between 1889 and 1893, Italy initiated an extensive recruitment of an indigenous army. Volunteers were not lacking as the drought-stricken population had since 1889 been flooding into Massawa in search of employment. Recruitment to the colonial army offered not only a means of livelihood, but initiated a new era of conspicuous consumption. Since most of those recruited were from the peasantry, they showed little interest in opposing the elimination of the elite.

Mass-Based Resistance

Mass-based resistance coincided with a major change in colonial policy and the recovery from the long famine of 1888-1892. Resistance suppresed, the colonial state felt that the moment had come to build the necessary infrastructure in order to use the colony for the purpose of settling Italian landless peasants.[37] According to the recommendations of the Commission of Enquiry of 1891,[38] an office for the settlement of colonists was established. Leopoldo Franchetti - an expert on the southern Italy problem - was appointed as a special deputy to run the office. The settlement office was empowered to select the areas to be expropriated, to decide on the type of colonists, to arrange their transport and to provide them with funds and equipment until the first harvest. Encouraged by the results of the two agricultural experimental stations established in 1891 in Asmera and Kudofellassi, Franchetti instructed Baratieri, the military governor, to proceed with expropriation in 1893. Within a year, more than 483,000 acres - nearly three-fifth of the arable land - had been appropriated. By 1894, the process of settling Italian peasants had begun. About a dozen peasant families were settled at Kudofellassi.[39] The policy of settling peasants, although finally abortive, was to be the major cause for a mass-based resistance in the Abyssinian parts of Eritrea.

On December 14, 1894, Bahta Hagos, the leading chief of Akele-Guzay and Serae[40] and a trusted man since 1888, gathered his forces of about 2,000 men and issued a call for resistance.[41] Unlike Aberra, his position was not jeopardized. Converted to Catholicism sometime between 1889 and 1890, Bahta was considered

an ideal collaborationist. His decision to resist Italian rule shocked the colonial state and the pro-imperialist forces in Italy. In fact, it was not until 1913 that the real issues behind the Bahta uprising were fully appreciated.[42]

From the outset, Bahta realized that a successful resistance had to bring together the collaborating elites, the peasantry and the Ethiopian state. According to Ardemani, who was in the area at the time of the resistance, Bahta, after having arrested Lieutenant Sanguinetti and the two Italian telegraph operators, sent messages to Assaorta, Serae, Shimezana and Akele-Guzay.[43] He asked the collaborating chiefs as well as the peasantry to join him in resisting the Italians through what later became an historical idiom: "there is no medicine for the bite of a white serpent."[44] To the rulers of Tigray, Bahta is alleged to have written repeatedly, though none of his own letters have been traced.[45] The Italians believed that Bahta kept Ras Mengesha, the ruler of Tigray, fully informed. According to Cappucci, Bahta wrote several letters to Menelik, in which he warned the Emperor not to play the Italians' game.[46] And Menelik in reply is alleged to have assured Bahta that all would eventually go well and advised him to exercise more patience until further instructins arrived.[47]

On December 15 war preparations were not limited to Akrur and Sageneiti. All of the regions of Zena Degle, Akele-Guzay, Shimezana and Serae were in a state of war.[48] On the same day Bahta is said to have explained the motives for his resistance in a rhetorical question: "What do we do with the Italians who have cometo take our lands away?"[49] Apparently satisfied by what seemed to him to be the unanimous reply of 'war', Bahta slowly proceeded to plan the course of resistance. His confidence was probably reinforced by the assurances of support that were brought to him from Ras Mengesha, Emperor Menelik, and the regions under his control.[50] Bahta could have strengthened and organized his forces better if he had immediately attacked the poorly defended fort at Halay with his comparably large army. His delay of nearly three days allowed Baratieri to despatch an army of 3,500 from Asmera and Massawa. When Bahta, fully aware of the presence of Italian forces in the area, belatedly attacked the fort on the afternoon of the eighteenth, the battle was as good as lost. Toselli and Castelazzi surrounded the forces of Bahta and in a matter of hours the Bahta resistance had been subdued. Bahta was killed by a fifth columnist.[51]

A mass-based, anti-colonist movement was thus clearly expressed for the first time since 1885 when colonialism began to manifest itself as a phenomenon which could deny the peasantry its only means of livelihood. The limitations of what the Italians had regarded as unlimited collaboration were now dawning upon the colonial state and the metropole.[52] The suppression of the resistance led by Bahta was not sufficient to erase his ghost and the probability of another uprising. Partly in order to suppress Eritrean resistance completely, Baratieri decided to invande Tigray, where the followers of Bahta were regrouping. What started as a limited campaign turned into a war to colonize Ethiopia. In the battle of Adwa in March, 1896, Italay lost about 4,000 Italians and 2,000 Eritreans in dead alone. After 1896, the fear that another act of resistance would elicit support from Tigray and other parts of Ethiopia continued to dominate Italian colonial policy.[53]

In 1895 the office of colonist settlement was abolished. Although for Italian internal political reasons, the policy of colonist settlement remained an objective of the colonial state, its future applicability was severely curtailed. The laws of 1903 and 1909 recognized the proprietary rights of the indigenous population. Previously expropriated land was either returned to its owners or rented at a nominal fee. By 1913, there were 62 Italian farmers cultivating 6,500 hectares of land, most of whichwas of poor quality.[54] In reality, the function of the colony had changed from that of a 'colony of settlement' into that of a 'colony of trade'.[55] And in colonies of trade, colonial rule depended for its continuity and success on forging collaboration with the indigenous ruling class.

The drastic change in economic policy greatly diffused resistance, but did not eliminate it. The main area of confrontation remained the few thousand hectares of land under Italian possession. In 1905, the people of Hammassen and Akele-Guzay under their collaborationist leaders threatened the colonial state that they would ask for the intervention of Emperor Menelik to help them get back the expropriated land.[56] It is hard to know whether this confrontation ws limited to the issue in question or was a part of a resistance movement against Italian rule. The message was, however, clear. Further expropriation was virtually ruled out. In contrast to the wanton expropriation of 1893, the colonial state preferred to enter into a long-drawn conflict with the Italian colonists rather than with the Tigrinyans over the question of expropriation.[57]

The Tigrinyans in Eritrea seem to have realized that Ethiopian support was necessary for effective resistance. It was partly the knowledge of their limitations that gave rise to the widespread rumours in 1913-1914 of an Ethiopian invasion of Eritrea.[58] At Asmera as well as in the newly created Ministry of Colonies, not only were these rumours taken seriously, but they were used to reinforce the policy of collaboration initiated by Martini and rigorously pursued by Salvago raggi. At the outbreak of World War I, a delicate balance had been reached between the Eritrean people and the colonial state. Wanton expropriation having been stopped, the colonial state could proceed to diffuse resistance by several means, one of which was collaboration.

Reactions to Italian Colonialism: Collaboration

Collaboration resulted from a consistent policy as much as it was a rational Eritrean response to the political and economic realities of colonialism. The Bahta resitance of 1894 had been one of the major factors that caused the Italo-Etiopian War of 1895-96. In the metropole, the loss both in terms of men and financial resources was deeply felt. In early 1897, the Cabinet, expressing the opinions of the anticolonist sentiments in parliament, resolved to withdraw from the colony in dignity.[59] Negotiations were secretly undertaken with Leopold, the King of the Belgians, for the transfer of Eritrea against reasonable compensation.[60] While Di Rudini, the prime minister, instructed Martini to liquidate the colony with dignity, King Umberto secretly instructed the latter to retain the colony for Italy.[61] From the outset, Martini seemed to to have fully understood that the colony could be kept for Italy

only if resistance and rebellion could be successfully diffused.

Once in the colony, Martini adopted a highly conciliatory policy towards the traditional elite in the highlands.[62] In order to avoid rebellion and minimize the serious problem of desertion, he agreed to extend pardon to many who fought against Italy during the Bahta uprising. The delicate issue of using the colony for settlement was soon resolved. According to a report he commissioned, the verdict on colonist settlement and the expropriation of land as a means for its achievement was negative.[63] Settlement was envisaged as a possibility only when carried out with the consent of the indigenous owners. And consent, the report advised, could come about through intensive introduction of capitalist activities where the 'natives' would willingly leave their lands in lieu of salaried labour.[64] On the basis of this report and with the Bahta resistance still in mind, Martini evolved a policy where the colony would be made to provide raw materials, mainly cash crops, for the mother country.

Important as these policies might be, the objectives of Martini were to secure a lasting peace for the colony. The highlands of Eritrea, i.e., the Tigrinyan parts, were up to 1900 considered to be integral parts of Etiopia. As the Bahta uprising and the continuous desertions demonstrated, Tigray and the rest of Ethiopia served both as centers of refuge and subversion. Through the Italo-Ethiopian Treaty of 1900, Martini achieved legal recognition of Italian occupation.[65] In 1904, Martini succeeded in pursuading Dejjach Gebre Silasse, the ruler of northern Tigray, to pay an official visit to Asmera. The political gains by Martini and the colonial state were significant. Martini signed an extradition treaty with Dejjach Gebre Sillase, thus reducing the possibilities of resistance from across the border. At the same time, he succeeded in further legitimating Italian rule by publicizing the extradition and friendship treaty between the two governments. Martini's policy of peaceful coexistence reached its peak in 1905-6 when he managed to squeeze from Emperor Menelik an invitation to visit Addis Abeba. According to the diplomatic custom of the period, Menelik instructed his officers along the Asmera-Addis Abeba route to provide protection and dirgo (food and drink) for the European guests.[66] Italian colonial rule was thus sanctioned. To the people in Eritrea, it became apparent that as long as this situation remained, resistance had to be planned and undertaken without the support of the Abyssinians across the border. The extent to which Italy's bargaining power had been enhanced can be easily appreciated.

It is, however, difficult to speak even in this case of Eritrean political collaboration. The informants of Kolmodin, fully cognizant of the implications of Martini's peaceful policy, remarked that "as a result of Italo-Ethiopian treaties they had become subjects of Italy".[67] In the absence of appropriate conceptual terms, the reaction of the Abyssinian people in Eritrea could from 1897 to 1914 be described as 'coerced political collaboration'. Abyssinian resistance was not directed against Italian economic activities but against Italian political rule: a phenomenon that curtailed the free exercise of their own political authority and greatly reduced their chances of a political career. In this respect, Eritrean resistance could be said to be predominantly elitist, in the sense that it was the aspirants to political office

who were most concerned about the presence of Italian rule.

The diverse social formations in the colony further enhanced the trend of prolonging the life of collaboration. The Hadendowa, Beni-Amer and Afar had very little to sacrifice by collaborating. Inhabiting the ecological zones that were least suitable for colonist settlement, these communities experienced far less upheaval than their Tigrinyan counterparts. Slowly drawn in to the market economy through the mediation of their traditional elite, their perception of colonialism was that of a phenomenon committed to the maintenance of law and the development of commerce. These communities hardly felt the difference between economic and political collaboration.

From the Habab, Mensa, Marya, Baria, Kunama, Bogos and Saho, political collaboration was easily elicited for two important reasons. Firstly, the Ethiopian state considered these regions as peripheries (**dar ager** means literally 'countries along the border') esential to its survival. In order to maintain their huge armies, Ethiopian kings had institutionalized periodical raids into peripheries as well as into rebelling core regions. By using the north and northwestern parts of Eritrea as its peripheries the state deepened the alienation of these communities vis-a-vis itself. For these regions, collaboration meant an end to periodical raids. Secondly, with the exception of Saho, Baria and Kunama, these communities were sharply divided into ruling and serf (vassal) castes. In one of the customary codes recorded by Conti Rossini, it is specifically stated that "there was no way by which the blood of Bet Tarche (the ruling caste of the Bogos) could run into the veins of a Tigre, the serf or vassal caste."[68] The Tigre serfs who repeatedly asked the colonial state to free them from their onerous obligations would most certainly have rebelled against their ruling castes had the latter chosen to resist. Their demands, however, were not met by the Italians. While political collaboration appeared to meet the interests of the ruling castes, the gains of the serfs were less significant. Although collaboration with colonialism eliminated the threat of periodic raids from the Ethiopian/Abyssinian state, the Tigre remained serfs almost until the end of the 1940's.[69]

Lasting collaboration with colonialism resulted from the slow but steady growth of the market economy and the new economic (capitalistic) order set up by the colonial state. Economic collaboration was not only freely given, but actively sought. Throughout the period, the colonial army remained the most presigious centre for recruitment to the money economy. Although salaries were low, they were considerably higher than incomes enjoyed by Menelik"s soldiers.[70] During the Italian campaign in Libya in 1911-12, the colonial state despatched 6,000 men from Eritrea to serve in the Italian expansion in North Africa.[71]The overall economic impact of militarization cannot be overestimated. Taking the census of 1900 as a guide, the colonial army alone employed about three out of every ten productively active men of the colony.[72] Slightly more than 20 percent were engaged in the construction and commercial sector of the economy. The new economic system leassened the problem of land scarcity considerably. Those who remained in the colony had, in addition to their small pieces of land, some extra land available, which they could cultivate on the basis of share-cropping. The additional sources of income, supplementing but not

yet substituting the returns of the traditional mode of production, nevertheless brought about a period of prosperity and abundance to a population with fresh memories of the great famine of 1888 - 1892. Imports of cotton textiles - the main item - increased from 2,400,000 lire in 1897 to 3,470,000n lire in 1905 and reached 4,485,000 lire by 1910. [73]

By 1914, recruitment had reached a peak of 23,000 men, including the 6,000 stationed in Libya.[74] The militarization of the colony, as Paoli perceptively noted, deprived the capitalist sector of much needed labour and capital.[75] However, in so far as the important objectives of colonialism were concerned, the colonial state stood to gain: the employment abroad of 6,000 men out of a total population of c. 300,000 considerably reduced the threat of resistance, thus enabling the colonial state to consolidate its political rule. Furthermore, the social and political consequences of militarization were less disruptive to the traditional socio-political fabric, upon which colonial policy was to depend heavily in the future.

Despite the fact that this new economic order had been imposed and dictated from outside, it gained acceptance as it was a partial fulfilment of a rather long-standing desire of African pre-colonial societies to participate in the advanced European industrial economy. At Agordat cotton plantations had by 1906 begun modest export. Pearl, salt, palma dum, oil seeds, wax, hides and livestock constituted the main exports. From 2,745,470 lire in 1900, exports increased to 6,772,440 lire in 1906 and continued to rise until by 1910 they had reached 11,135,000 lire.[76] Throughout the period, the Banyans (Indians) and later the Italian merchants dominated import-export activities. In this new economic order, the Eritrean people were involved as labourers and producers of raw materials for export. Available documentation does not show the extent to which Eritrean merchants could rise to compete with the Italians and the Banyans. However, what we know is that Martini ruled out any violent measures in the restructuring of the colonial economy. The Eritreans were not thoroughly aware that economic collaboration might in the fugure plunge them into a dependency syndrome where they might be the losers.

By 1914, Italy had evolved a colonial policy that could prolong its colonial rule into the future. Impoverished Tigray and highly divided Ethiopia were unlikely to pose a serious threat as long as the Italians refrained from provoking the Tigrinyans either in Eritrea or in Ethiopia. In essence, the task of building Eritrea as a separate economic and political unit had begun. Whether the Eritreans would offer a united resistance in the future would depend, among other things, on Italian educational policy. Up to 1914, the primary aim of Italian educationsl policy was to deny the Eritreans a modern education. [77] It could easily be foreseen that the future of Eritrean political consciousness and resistance were bound to encounter serious difficulties.

FOOTNOTES

*I have greatly benefited from Sven Rubenson's critical remarks while revising this paper for publication in the **Proceedings.**

1. Cf. A.B. Davidson, "African Resitance and Rebellion against the Imposition of Colonial Rule," T.O. Ranger (ed.), **Emerging Themes of African History** (Nairobi, 1968); T.O. Ranger, "Connextions Between 'Primary resistance' movements and Modern Mass Nationalism in East and Central Africa," Part 1 and 2, **Journal of African History**, 11, 3-4 (1968); idem, "African Reactions to the Imposition of Colonial Rule in East and Central Africa," I (London, 1969); A. Isaacman, **The Tradition of Resistance in Mozambigue: Anti-Colonial Activity in the Zambesi Valley, 1850-1921** (London, 1976).

2. Df. R.E. Robinson, "Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a theory of collaboration," R. Owen and B. Sutcliffe (eds.), **Studies in the Theory of Imperialism** (London, 1972); E.I. Steinhardt, **Conflict and Collaboration: The Kingdoms of West Uganda, 1890-1907** (Princeton, 1977).

3. Cf. W. Rodney, **How Europe Underdeveloped Africa** (London, 1972); E.A. Brett, **Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa: The Politics of Economic Change** (London, 1973); L.H. Gann and Peter Duignan, **Burden of Empire: An Appraisal of Western Colonialism in Africa South of the Sahara** (London, 1967); idem, (eds.), **Colonialism in Africa: The Economics of Colonialism** (Cambridge, 1975).

4. I have greatly benefited from G.M. Frederickson's and C. Lasch's use of the concept of resistance: "Resistance to Slavery," **Civil War History**, 13, 4 (1967). The definition of resistance provided by Ronald H. Chilcote: "the reaction of a given section of the population to certain environmental, political, economical, cultural or social conditions which is accompanied by organizational mobilization directed towards the amelioration of adverse conditins" is too broad to be useful. R.H. Chilcote (ed.), **Protest and Resistance in Angola and Brazil** (Berkeley, 1972), p. 2.

5. Cf. Audrey Wipper, **Rural Rebels: A Study of Two Protest Movements in Kenya** (London, 1977).

6. Cf. C. Van Onselen, **Chibaro: Rhodesian Mineworkers, 1900-1935** (London, 1976).

7. The ruling castes are known by different names among the various ethnic groups, whereas the serfs (vassals or subjects) are commonly known as Tigre. It is worthwhile to bear in mind that Tigre is used in two senses. Firstly, it is a language commonly spoken by the Habab, Marya, Mensa and their serfs. Secondly, it describes the social category of a person. In this sense, it denotes a serf (vassal or subject). On the relationship between the ruling caste and the serfs, the following general works can be consulted: Carlo Conti Rossini, **Principi di diritto consuetudinario della colonia Eritrea** (Rome, 1916), K.G. Rodén, **Le Tribu dei Mensa** (Stockholm, 1913) and J.S. Trimingham, **Islam in Ethiopia** (London, 1952).

8. On the Saho, the main source remains Carlo Conti Rossini, op.cit. On the Baria and Kunama, W. Munzinger, **Studi sull'Africa Orientale** (Rome, 1890) and Alberto Pollera, **I Baria e Cunama** (Rome, 1913) can be consulted.

9. Cf. Gene Ellis, "The Feudal Paradigm as a Hindrance to Understanding Ethiopia," **The Journal of Modern African Studies**, 14, 2 (1976) pp. 275-295.

10. Two of the most remarkable emperors of the 19th century, Tewodros and Yohannes, achieved their status primarily because of their military and political ingenuity. G.L. Steer, a British Intelligence officer, who worked with the Ethiopian army in the mid-1930's remarked that "the Ethiopian system was not a feudal system: it was a tough-man system." **Ceasar in Abyssinia** (London, 1936), p. 164.

11. M. Abir, **The Era of the Princes** (London, 1968), ch. 2.

12. Only during the Ethio-Egyptian wars of 1875 and 1876, Emperor Yohannes might well have had up to 50,000 men, excluding attendants, concentrated in Tigray and parts of Eritrea for several months. Cf. Sven Rubenson, **The Survival of Ethiopian Independence** (London, 1976), pp. 318-326.

13. Rubenson, op.cit., pp. 140-142, 377-378.

14. R. Pankhurst, "The Great Ethiopian Famine of 1888-1892: A New Assessment," **Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences**, 21 (1966), pp. 271-294.

15. B. Tafla, "Political crisis in Tigrai, 1889-1899." **Africa**, 34, I (Rome, 1979), pp. 105-128.

16. Rubenson, op.cit., p. 379.

17. Ibid., pp. 356-362.

18. Roberto Battaglia, **La Prima Guerra d'Africa** (Torino, 1858), pp. 230-235; Rubenson, op.cit., p. 381.

19. Bahta Hagos, the leading chief of the Abyssinian districts of Serae and Akele-Guzay, was one of the dissidents whom the Italians sheltered after 1888.

20. H.G. Marcus, **The Life and Times of Menelik II: Ethiopia 1844-1913** (London, 1975), p. 110.

21. The Italians occupied the Abyssinian districts of Eritrea without any resistance at all.

22. Angelo Del Boca, **Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale** (Milano, 1975), pp. 435-442; Romain Rainero, **L'anticolonialismo italiano da Assab ad Adua** (Milano, 1971), pp. 243-244. The main source of the information is Livarghi, a commander of the colonial police up to the end of 1890. Livarghi was accused of condemning to death the famous merchant Hassan Muss el-Akad. In his defence, Livarghi stated that his superiors were responsible for a far more systematic genocide. The Parliamenta-

ry Commission of Enquiry that visited Eritrea between April 22 and June 10, 1891, found out that the number killed did not exceed 17. The Commission was more concerned with other issues than with the Livarghi allegations. Although Del Boca and Rainero see no reason to suspect Livarghi's sincerety, his information needs to be considered with caution. There is no doubt, however, that Livarghi's disclosure provides important information on the colonial state in Eritrea.

23. Adem Aga was subsequently detained and his band disbanded. Archivo storico del Ministro dell'Africa Italiana (ASMAI), pos. 3/5, file 37, May 11, 1981.

24. J. Kolmodin, **Traditiones de Tsazzega et Hazzega** (Tigrigna text), (Rome, 1912), pp. 257-258.

25. Ibid., p. 258.

26. Baratieri to Ministry of War (Rome), March 18, 1892, explaining the death of Captain Bettini; ASMAI, pos. 3/6, file 41.

27. Kolmodin, op.cit., pp. 260-261.

28. The main source is Ferdinando Martini's voluminous diary from 1897-1907, **Il Diario Eritrea** (Rome, 1946).

29. Martini op.cit., vol. 3, p. 48 (July 11, 1902).

30. Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 116-117 (February 17, 1903).

31. Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 226 (June 30, 1903).

32. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 121 (April 6, 1901).

33. Blatta Gebre Igziabiher's correspondence and his 235 pages long memoire on the moral and material decline of Ethiopia were located in the archive of the colony of Eritrea (henceforth Archivio Eritrea) deposited at the Historical Archive of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Archivio Eritrea, pacco 1008.

34. Martini, op.cit., vol. 4, 377 (May 26, 1905).

35. Archivio Eritrea, Pacco 419, contains a report on the escape, dated Nov. 18, 1899.

36. Kolmodin, op.cit., p. 257.

37. Rocco De Zerbi, **L'Inchiesta Sulla Colonia Eritrea** (Rome, 1891), pp. 45-47.

38. Ibid.

39. Leopoldo Franchetti, **Appendice alla relazione annuale sulla colonia Eritrea** (Rome, 1894), pp. 25-30.

40. Di Rudini appointed Bahta Hagos in 1891 as autonomous chief of Serae and Akele-Guzay. ASMAI, pos. 3/7, file 49.

41. Ernesto Ardemani, **Tre Pagine Gloriose nella Storia militaire-civile-religiosa della Colonia Eritrea** (Rome, 1901), p. 107.

42. Ardemani, op.cit., p. 90, argued that one of the causes of Bahta's rebellion was the expropriation of land, but is was Alberto Pollera who through his detailed study on the regime of land tenure succeeded in clarifying the motives behind the rebellion. **Il Regime della proprieta terreiera in Etiopia e nella Colonia Eritrea** (Rome, 1913), p. 67.

43. Ardemani, op.cit., p. 94.

44. Kolmodin, op.cit., p. 262.

45. An accomplice of Bahta was charged and condemned to death on the grounds that he had, during a considerable period of time, written several letters on behalf of Bahta to Ras Mengehsa and Menelik. ASMAI, pos. 3/7, file 51, March 15, 1895.

46. Cappucci to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 15, 1897, ASMAI, pos. 3/7, file 49.

47. Ibid.

48. Ardemani, opcit., p. 94.

49. Ardemani wrote that Bahta addressed his followers on December 16. He did not, however, know the contents of Bahta's speech. Ato Mehari, an Eritrean from Saganetti, who joined the colonial army in 1930 and whom I met in Rome (1977), informed me that Bahta had more or less presented the problem in that theoretical manner.

50. Capucci; see note 46 above.

51. Ardemani, op.cit., p. 121.

52. Leopoldo Franchetti (op.cit., p. 18) was aware that the Abyssinians might in the future come to feel the presence of another race among them.

53. The main aspect of colonial policy that emerges from the diaries of Martini was not only to diffuse resistance inside Eritrea, but to develop peaceful coexistence with Tigray and Ethiopia. His successor, Salvago Raggi, pursued Martini's policy further. See Salvago to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Asmara, June 8, 1911, ASMAI, pos. 11/8, file 70.

54. Although the colonial state officially stated that c. 180,000 acres were still available to Italian colonists, those that were under effective cultivation in the highlands were up to 1935 not more than 6,500 hectares. Giacomo Battistella, **Il credito agrario e fondiario in Africa Orientale** (Tripoli, 1941), pp. 212-213.

55. F. Martini, "L'Italia e l'Eritrea," F. Martini (ed.), **L'Eritrea Economica** (Novara, 1913), pp. 16-17.

56. Unfortunately, I have not had access to the proceedings of the **Congresso degli Italiani all'estero** where Martini fully explained the circumstances of the case. I derived my information from the statements of the foreign minister, Di San Giuliano, presented to the Chamber of Deputies; pos. 24/2, file. 30. The memorandum is not dated. It could not,however, have been written after 1911.

57. In 1911 the colonial state felt compelled to expropriate the land of Senaser and Shelal villages for public use. "If we were to evict the villagers without giving them comparable land." Slavago reasoned, "we would open ourselves to a new wave of accusations of being those who steal land from the population. An accusation which could arouse a new movement in the colony as well as outside the country." For the political security of the colony, Salvago decided to expropriate the lands of four colonists and give them to the villagers as compensation. The conflict between the colonial state and the colonists, who accused the state of eroding their rights, began in earnest. ASMAI, pos. 11/8, file 73.

58. Asmara to the Ministry of Colonies, May 6-13 and August 14, 1914, ASMAI, pos. 3/21, file 180, and pos. 3/22, file 185.

59. Martini, **Il Diario**, vol. 1, p. 2.

60. Rainero, op.cit., pp. 352-53.

61. Del Boca, op.cit., p. 752.

62. Martini, **Il Diario**, vol. 1, pp. 30, 46, 61; vol. 2, pp. 204, 242.

63. G. Bartolommei-Gioli, **La Colonizzazione agricola nella Colonia Eritrea** (Florence, 1903), p. 52.

64. Ibid.

65. Dated July 10, but according to Martini (**Il Diario**, vol. 2, p. 198), signed on May 28, 1900.

66. Martini, **Il Diario**, vol 4, p. 248. the volume contains detailed information about his experiences along the route to Addis Ababa.

67. Kolmodin, op.cit., p. 263.

68. Carlo Conti Rossini, op.cit., pp. 547-741.

69. Trimingham, op.cit., pp. 167-168.

70. Martini, **Il Diario**, vol. 2. p. 128.

71. Archivio Eritrea, Pacco 953, Commando del R. Corpo di Truppe Coloniali d'Eritrea to Capo di stato maggiore dell'Esercito, Roma, July 31, 1912.

72. Carlo Conti Rossini, **Il censimento della popolazioni indigene della Colonia Eritrea** (Rome, 1902).

73. Michele Checchi, **Movimento commerciale della Colonia Eritrea, 1885-1910** (Rome, 1911), p. 8.

74. Del Boca, op.cit., p. 843.

75. Renato Paoli, **Nella Colonia Eritrea** (Rome, 1908), p. 158.

76. Checchi, op.cit., p. 25.

77. Martini was adamant in his refusal to introduce modern education into Eritrea. His argument was that schooled Eritreans would challenge colonial rule. **Il Diario**, vol. 2, p. 472. Outlining the educational policy of the colony, Di San Giuliano explained to the Chamber of Deputies that the indigenous in Eritrea as well as in Somalia had a more or less infantile mentality and that one had therefore to be careful not to create any moral and mental imbalance through education. ASMAI, pos. 33/1, file 10, July 5, 1910.

PAX ITALICA AND ITS ETHIOPIAN ENEMIES, 1936-1940

Italian misrule in the Horn of Africa has been attributed to the fact that Italy did not have a well-developed colonial plan and that it was not prepared to rule Ethiopia, but to govern it as a mandate.[1] Hence Italian colonialism in general and the pacification policies in particular are explained as a series of mistakes committed by unprepared and inexperienced colonial bureaucrats. Italian colonialism is perceived as a conglomeration of isolated episodes[2] and not as a well-defined and coherent system of relations between the colonizer and the colonized. However, the argument that Italy was not fully prepared on colonial matters has limited explanatory value since none of the European colonialisms in Africa during the late nineteenth century were planned beforehand. What they did plan was the imposition of their political power over the weakly organized states of the world. In this matter, Italy, too, had an elaborate plan.[3] Other considerations, such as the modalities of power, relations between the colonizer and the colonized, and the political economy of the colonial state evolved through praxis.

These historiographic comments notwithstanding, the few studies on the subject provide considerable wealth of empirical data. Angelo Del Boca's trilogy on the Italians in East Africa is a work of encyclopedic dimension.[4] Sbacchi's major work, despite its lack of historical analysis, is extremely useful source material.[5] The importance of the series of articles and monographs on Ethiopian patriots is unfortunately reduced because they tell us very little on the nature of the resistance movement.[6] In this paper I aim to demonstrate first, that, Italy had a well-conceived colonial policy which it pursued with a high degree of consistence; secondly, that Italy deliberately provoked certain sections of the Ethiopian population, i.e., the Amhara, to resistance; and thirdly, that the Italians were fully aware of the nature of Ethiopian resistance. I have chosen to concentrate on the pacification phase of Italian colonialism for two reasons. Firstly, on the eve of the Italian entry into the Second World War, the provinces of Shoa, Amhara and Galla Sidama were far from pacified. Secondly, the story of the enemies of Italian pacification, i.e., Ethiopian resistance, can best be explained when told within the context of Italian colonial policies.[7]

Pacification Through the Reign of Terror, November 1935 - December 1937

Reign of terror as pacification policy had its genesis in 1934 when the irrevocable decision to conquer Ethiopians was planned. In this policy document, Mussolini, the head of the Italian state, outlined the motives, the goal and the means for the conquest. Briefly stated, the motive was to eliminate the threat imposed on Italian economic interests by the modernizing measures of the ex-emperor Haile Selassie.[8] The ultimate objective was to place Ethiopia under complete Italian political domination by using all the means available, including poison gas.[9] Soon after the occupation of Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, in early May 1936, Mussolini, through one of his well-known slogan type policy statements, laid down the basis for pacification through terror. The slogan 'no power to the rases',[10] which remained the cornerstone of Italian colonial policy, could only be implemented after Italy had achieved absolute victory over the country. High military officials including Marshal Graziani, Governor General of the Italian African Empire from May 21, 1936 to December 20, 1937, were aware that the policy of 'no power to the rases' would lead to prolonged confrontation and had in fact advised against it.[11] These were summarily overruled by the head of state, who alone was the source of all major colonial policies.[12] In order to speedily pacify the new empire in accordance with the 'no power to the rases' policy, the head of state instructed Graziani to shoot captured prisoners of war (on the spot).[13] All Ethiopians found in possession of arms, following notification that these must be returned to the Italians, were also to be summarily executed.[14] Furhtermore, rebel areas, or, areas where rebels were located, were to be sprayed with poison gas, the inhabitants indiscriminately killed, their villages destroyed and their property looted.[15]

When the Italians announced the conquest of Ethiopia, in May 1936 the war had not yet been brought to a conclusion. The lack of roads and the approaching rainy season were to make redundant the 466,000 strong Italian army of conquest.[16] An Ethiopian caretaker government existed in southern Ethiopia.[17] Moreover there were at least four contingents of the Ethiopian army operating in the central highlands. These forces were led by Ras Wendwessen Kassa, Ras Desta Damtew, the Kassa brothers and Dejach Balcia.[18] Until the beginning of September 1936, military initiative lay with the Ethiopians. The Italians, due to the rainy season, were beseiged on all sides,[19] and constrained to wait until the dry season, used their air power to maintain their presence in the new empire.

Italian military initiative began in September, and it soon became clear to the leaders of the remnant Ethiopian forces that they had little chance to withstand military confrontation.[20] The Ethiopian rases were willing to surrender if the new rulers agreed to confirm them in positions which they had held during the reign of Haile Selassie.[21] Since political concession to the rases ran counter to the cardinal policy of 'no power to the rases', the Italians opted for a military confrontation by insisting that the rases submit unconditionally and that the only guarantee which the Italian state would be willing to make was for the safety of their lives. In the process of defeating the rases, the Italians used extensive bombing, including the use of poison gas, thus

pacifying rebel areas through the reign of terror.[22] The Ethiopian rases were dealt with in this manner. By the end of 1936 the Ethiopian higher political and military elite had either fled, submitted or succumbed to the arms of the conqueror. It is extremely difficult to assess the human cost of pacification since the Italians provided ony random figures of rebels killed in battle.[23] Much less is of course known of those killed through aerial bombing and poison gas. On the other hand, we are often on safe ground concerning Italian losses from May 1936 until the end of the year.[24]

The first phase of pacification was about to be concluded to the satisfaction of Italy, when the attempt on the life of Graziani in February 1937 called forth a policy of terror multiplied tenfold.[25] Though Graziani soon recovered from his wounds, the impact of the attempt lingered far longer. The enemies of pacification were not only the rases, but also the indistinguishable urban and rural masses. Partly as an act of revenge and partly as an opportune moment to pacify the capital through elimination, Graziani signed the summary execution of 324 Ethiopians.[26] The Fascist Party, taking the law into its own hands, managed to murder between three and six thousand Ethiopians in 48 hours.[27] The attempt on Graziani's life was taken as an expressin of the yet uncrushed nationalist sentiments of the Amharas, the hitherto dominant ethnic group in Ethiopia. Graziani's policy after the attempt on his life was to eliminate the potential enemies of Italian power in the Horn of Africa. One such group was that of the educated Ethiopians, a marked target since July 10, 1936.[28] Graziani had earlier hesitated to take draconian measures against them, but after the attempted assassination he resorted to his earlier instructins and eliminated all those who were even vaguely suspected of treason.[29] Pacification through the reign of terror reached its climax in the massacre of the monks of Debre Libanos and the military expedition to the Ankober region.

On April 19, 1937 Graziani learned through a security report that the two Eritreans who had tried to murder him had taken an oath of loyalty administered by the vice-prior of the monastery of Debre Libanos.[30] The evidence was derived from a third person interrogated in Addis Ababa, and the report on the involvement or conspiracy of the monastery was far from convincing. Graziani, however, readily assumed that the entire monastery was guilty by association, and on the basis of this logic he ordered the execution of 330 monks and 119 deacons and the closure of the Monastery.[31] While the area around Debre Libanos was being bombed, Graziani sent the forces of General Maletti into the Ankober region to pursue 'rebels' who had escaped the reprisals carried out by the Fascist Party, February 19 - 21, 1937. This area had been pacified, i.e., bombed with poison gas earlier.[32] This time, however, the objective of the Maletti mission was to disarm the population, to eliminate suspected rebels together with their sympathizers and destroy their property. Maletti had 1500 colonial levies from the Oromo in Wollo, eager to mutilate the sexual organs of their victims. In his summary report Maletti commented on the stunning effect of the Oromo presence in the region and wrote that the population was overcome with panic.[33] The forces of Maletti operated from May 5 until June 15, 1937 with the 'victorious possession and pacification of the region'.[34] Italian losses were 10 dead and 6 wounded; Italian colonial soldiers: 98 dead and 238 wounded. Ethiopian losses stood at 15,078 killed.[35]

While Graziani pursued his policy of total pacification with 'iron and fire', his Ethiopian enemies were reorganizing themselves both military and politically. In the summer of 1937, the rebels in ex-Shoa, [36] i.e., Ankober etc., held their first meeting and agreed firstly to form an Ethiopian patriotic association. [37] and secondly, to proclaim Melake Tzehai Eyasu as their king. [38] Balamberas Abebe Aregai was elected to lead the rebellion. More military expeditions were despatched to the strongholds led by Abebe Aregai, where only in the last operation carried out between December 17, 1937 to January 9, 1938 Ethiopian losses amounted to 1448 killed. [39] Graziani lost 3 Italians dead and 7 wounded, while colonial soldiers suffered 135 dead and 201 wounded. [40]

Contrary to the expectations of the Italian head of state and the ministry of colonies in Rome, Italian pacification policy was challenged not only in the former Shoa but also in Gojjam and Beghemedir. Predominantly Amhara populated, the population of Gojjam and Beghemedir was hardly aware of Italian presence until mid-1937. Due to the roughness of the terrain and non-existence of roads, Italian forces rarely moved out from Gondar, the capital of Beghemedir, and Debre Markos, the capital of Gojjam. With the spread of Roman imperial roads into these regions, the Italians began to implement their policy of 'no power to the rases', the confiscation of arms and of land for the benefit of the Italian colonists. [41] Rebellion in these regions retained its local character. Italian colonialism was challenged politically on the grounds that it was not traditional and that it did not reshuffle power and power holders in the same manner as before. [42] By August 1937, Italian forces were suffering considerable losses in Gojjam and Beghemedir. Graziani, relying on his first-hand experience as the consolidator of Italian power and because of his close association with Ras Hailu, [43] interpreted the spread of rebellion as a concequence of the Italian pacification policy. He argued that the question was political power and that if Italy wanted to establish absolute power in the empire, there was no other alternative to pacification through terror. [44] In Rome the spread of rebellion was conveniently attributed to Graziani, although the real issue was not the spread of rebellion, but the financial cost of pacification. The spread of rebellion into the other regions made the reduction of the Italian African army to 100,000 from the then existing 218,000 men virtually impossible. [45] Pacification in the Graziani style was proving too costly. Unless colonial forces were significantly reduced, the financial cost of pacification would further deplete Italian treasury and foreign currency. It appeared that the empire, instaed of enriching the mother country, was in fact eating up Italy through its demands for financial resources. [46] the heavy Italian losses in Gojjam were deemed unacceptable and the ministry doubted whether Graziani's method was at all efficient. [47] At the height of Ethiopian resistance, Graziani was relaced by Amedeo the Duke of Aosta on December 25, 1937. During the 20 months of Graziani"s administration, Italian forces might have killed no less than 35,000 Ethiopians, excluding women and children killed during battle and the victims of air bombing and poison gas. [48]

Pacification through Apartheid

The conflict between Graziani and Rome was not over the goal of colonial policy, but on the method of achieving it. [49] I have

chosen to designate the new colonial policy which the Ministry of colonies and the head of state were willing to test as that of pacification through apartheid.[50] This policy was to a large extent developed in Addis Ababa rather than in Rome by the Duke of Aosta, whose reading on colonial matters was reputed to be extensive. However, the Duke did not exercise power alone. The military commander, virtually independent, planned and carried out pacification operations without prior approval of the Duke.[51] By virtue of the constitution of the African Empire of June 1936, the Governor General, if not at the same time a military commander, was exptedted to reign in the same was as Victor Emmanuel the Third in Rome. Real power lay with the Vice Governor appointed by and responsible to the Ministry of Colonies. To complicate matters further, the Fascist Party in the Italian East African Empire functioned in the same manner as the party at home. The structural constraints notwithstanding, the Duke succeeded in toning down terror as the predominant means of pacification. He gave a civilian character to the administration of the empire. In the early months of 1938 he abrogated the series of decrees commonly known as *i provvedimenti di rigore*, which empowered Italian officers to order summary execution of Africans.[52] Possession of arms was no longer considered a capital offence and captured rebels were granted due process of law.[53] The reestablishment of Shoa as a province was not only administratively wise, but it enhanced the image of Italian political power.[54] From the available literature it appears that the Duke put priority on laying down the basis for a long term colonial policy rather than on achieving political stability regardless of its cost, duration and effectiveness. According to the biographer of the Duke and the few but influential contemporary published sources, the empire was to be pacified through ethnic partition and the division of the empire into European mixed and native zones.[55]

The policy of retribalization or ethnic partition crudely expressed in the campaign against the Amharas was a legacy from the Graziani period, when it was considered that the fewer Amharas alive the better.[56] The anti-Amhara campaigns were also meant to persuade the non-Amhara groups to closer cooperation with Italy. The Duke, however, perfected the method and presumably explained the long-term effects of ethnic partition. During the Graziani period the Muslims and the Gallas were expected to cooperate with the Italians against the 'ruthless Amhara oppressors'. The Eritreans and the Somalis were on the other hand elevated to a higher status in recognition of their contribution to the construction of the empire. It was provided that the Eritrean and Somali ex-colonial soldiers be able to acquire licences to start small business in preference to the other inhabitants of the empire. No restrictions were to be imposed on those who might want to join the profession of truck driving. The record of colonial army service being the highest merit, the holder was to be preferred for non-military appointments in the empire in general, and in Eritrea and Somalia in particular.[57] In addition, they were no longer to be called natives but Eritreans and Somalis. In the hierarchy of colonial privilges which the Duke inherited and was set to elaborate, the Eritreans and the Somalis occupied the highest rung on the ladder, followed by the Muslims, then the Gallas, and last and least the Amharas. Once ethnically organized and administered, the colonial state would find it easy to defeat practically any local resistance.[58] This is predominantly because such a political organiza-

tion would make extremely difficult, if not impossible, the evolution of multi-ethnic resistance, the possibility of which had since the summer 1937 become discernible. The policy of ethnic partition was pursued in Harar and in Galla Sidama.[59] Harar was declared a Muslim region to be henceforth inhabited by Muslims alone. The Amharas in Harar were asked to leave, selling their property either to the Muslims or to the state. By mid-1939, the governor of Hrar felt secure that the task of laying down the basis for ethnic partition of Harar was achieved.[60] From the bast province of Galla Sidama, Italaian policy remained the removal of the Amhara. During the Graziani period, the Amhara in Galla Sidama were to be eliminated,[61] whereas in the period of the Duke they were to be dealt with in the same way as their cousins had been treated in Harar.[62] Even Addis Ababa, the capital city of the empire, did not escapte ethnic partition. First, the city was divided into European and native quarters, and secondly, the natives were organized along their ethnic origins.

Concerning the long-term relations between the Italians and the 'natives', the Duke outlined an elaborate framework whereby the empire would be divided into three geographical zones. Areas fully inhabited by Italians were to constitute the first zone. In this zone, autonomous political-administrative structures were to be developed.[63] The role of the colonial state would presumably cease since it was envisaged that zone one would be an Italian socio-economic community planted in African soil. The second zone included a much wider area where the main economic activity would be carried out by Italian agro-industry, i.e., cultivation of sugar and cotton, production of salt, meat and canning industries, etc. The natives would not be completely pushed out as they would be needed to provide labour and in some agricultural enterprises they could also form some sort of partnership with Italian colonists.[64] The colonial state would function as a mediator between the first zone and the other two zones. The last zone was presumably to comprise the area of least economic interest to Italy. This area would be entirely at the disposition of the 'natives' and Italian interests would have been best served through indirect rule.[65]

While the Duke refined the long-term social and economic structures of the empire, Mussolini and the Ministry of COlonies, through a series of decrees and laws, provided the juridical basis for apartheid. Cities and towns were to be divided into Italian and native quarters. Italians were not to be employed by natives. Cohabitation with natives was a criminal offence carrying prison punishment from one to five years.[66] Natives were to be instructed and not to be educated.[67] Through a considerable body of pseudo-scientific literature, the necessity for the separation of the races was explained. However, apartheid as a colonial policy as well as a means for pacification was neither an aberration[68] nor a symptom of Italian inferiority complex.[69] The establishment of such a policy was the logical result of a political will expressed as early as 1934, mainly that of achieving absolute political domination over Ethiopia. Such a colonial policy would eliminate the perennial problem of educated natives,[70] since there would be no educated natives. Resistance would be dealt with easily, as a united movement in an empire organized ethnically would be extremely difficult. The control of the political, economic and social conditions of the colonized could only be enforced through a colo-

nial policy similar to apartheid.[71] The alternative would have been indirect rule, commonly associated with the British Colonial policy in Tropical Africa but also practiced by the French. Italy was so heavily committed to its colonial policy of direct control that a shift to indirect rule would have put into high relief the powerlessness of Italy vis-a-vis the conquered subjects. A meaningful shift to indirect rule would have required a major change of political attitudes, in other words, a political revolution.

A great deal of emphasis has been put on the inapplicability of the racial laws, hence the irrational or abberational aspect of Italian colonial policy.[72] Violations against the law of cohabitation were explained either by lack of seriousness of intent concerning the racial laws or by the refusal of the Italians to abide by such rules. It is, however, my contention that the racial laws were impossible to implement due to the imbalance between the number of Italian men and women in the empire. In Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, there were 57,000 Italian single men and virtually no Italian women.[73] The seriousness of the colonial state on the race question can be evidenced through the decree which made it impossible for an Italian to become the legal father of a child born through cohabitation with a 'native'.[74]

By 1940 Italy was still in the stage of pacifying the empire. The enemies of pacification in Shoa were considerably weakened and by late 1930 they did not hesitate to enter into negotiations with the assistants of the Duke. Those in Beghemedir and Gojjam were relatively in a much stronger positin and the Italian forces were to a large extent constrained to remain in their well-fortified bases. Italians, both in the empire and in Italy, were enraged by the persistence of the rebellion,[75] but there was no shortage of material and human resources to deal with the problem.[76] In other words the Italians were in a strong enough position to pursue their enemies until these were either exhausted or unti the apartheid policy of the Duke began to undermine the social, political and economic basis of resistance.

Enemies of Pax Italica: Ethiopian Resistance

Resitance led by the officers of Haile Selassie ended in February 1937 with the capture and execution of Ras Desta Damtew.[77] Led by the lower nobility, the new resistance that emerged in the summer of 1937 had no allegiance to the exiled emperor. In Shoa, the remnant forces of the Kassa brothers, Ras Desta, Dejach Balcia, Dejach Fikie Mariam met in the summer of 1937 and elected Balamberas Abebe Aregai as their leader. We are told that during this organizational meeting, an Ethiopian patriotic association was also formed, but hardly anything more is known or heard about it. In one of the rare documents of Shoan rebels, the Italians are described as people who have come to eliminate the Ethiopian race and take their property.[78] The Shoans reminded the people of Gajjam that many nobles and notables had been killed and that the nobility no longer enjoyed political power; that the Italians had declared their intention of appropriating "our cattle, our sons and have even begun selecting from our women to make them into their wives". They appealed to the sons of Gajjam and the descendents of Israel to fight for their religion and their property and to resist the enemy in the name of their religion.[79] It is vir-

tually impossible to assess the impact of the Shoan decument on the people of Gojjam. The rebellion of Gojjam and Beghemedir had in fact preceded the Shoan message. By August 1937 Ethiopian resistance had spread to Gojjam, Beghemedir and Galla Sidama. Even the Gallas, whom the Italians loudly claimed to have freed from Amhara slavery, had risen against the Italians. According to the secret diary of C. Poggiali, who as a correspondent of the Corriere della Sera was stationed in Italian East Africa from June 1936 until October 1937, in the country of the Galla a kind of holy war "in the name of Ras Gobena had recently been proclaimed."[80] "The gravest aspect of the rebellion", continued Poggiali, "was that the Gallas allowed themselves to be led by the most hated Amharas."

The culprits for the spread of rebellion were the Amhara in general and the Shoans in particular. Taking the Shoan document to the people of Gojjam, Graziani reminded the provincial governors once again that the Shoan action was a manifestation of their spirit of revendication. He instructed his subordinates that they drop any feeling of sentimentalism towards the Amhara and that they obey his standing directive and proceed to eliminate, eliminate and eliminate the Amharas.[81] Explaining the spreading rebellion, Graziani in one of his final politico-military situation reports emphasized three issues. These were firstly the continuous curbing of Shoan and Amhara privileges, in other words the implementation of direct control of the political and economic activities of the region inhabitated by the Amharas. Secondly, Graziani, turning to his favorite theme, accused foreign direct and indirect interference, and thirdly, the inefficiency of the colonial bureaucratic machinery.[82] For the Ethiopian rebels and for Ras Hailu, the former hereditary ruler of Gojjam, the cause and spread of rebellion was primarily Italian refusal to concede local power to the Ethiopian nobility. In a number of reports to Graziani, Ras Hailu explained that the Italians would be able to live in peace if they would either confirm or appoint people of their choice over administrative zones according to the political custom of the country.[83] From Gojjam, the leaders of the rebellion, writing to Ras Hailu, justified their rebellion on the grounds that the Italians were not ruling according to the Ethiopian manner. Weizero Seblewenghel, the daughter of Ras Hailu and the wife of the de facto leader of the Gojjam rebellion wrote that Gojjam would cease to rebel if the Italians recognized the right of Ras Hailu to rule over Gojjam.[84] Since, however, such concession would have meant a complete reversal of colonial policy from direct rule to something similar to indirect rule of the British, Graziani opted for the continuation of the policy of total political domination while, as was pointed out earlier, Rome, slightly disturbed by the financial cost of pacification and the growing rate of casualties, began to review the entire situation.

The leadership of the Shoan resitance was made up of Abebe Aregai, Zewde Asfaw, Mesfin Sileshi, and Takele Welde Hawariate. All of these originated in northeastern Shoa with its deep gorges and inaccessible escarpments overlooking the Adal plains. Located on the main highway artery, that of Addis Ababa - Dessie - Asmara, their region was ideal for guerilla warfare. Due to the high priority given to the communication line and due to its proximity to Addis Ababa, the region was one of the most subject to the reign of terror. In 1937-38 the main concerns of the Shoan patriots were the establishment of a secure base of operations, contacts with

other resistance groups and recruitment of new patriots. The problem of recruiting new patriots being closely related to the legitimacy of Shoan rebel leadership, it was resolved in the traditional Ethiopian political system. This was done by first proclaiming Lij Melake Tzehay Eyasu as King and expressing allegiance to him. [85] The young king in turn appointed Abebe Aregai to the title of Ras. It was not sufficient that Abebe was elected a leader; he must also occupy a certain position in the political hierarchy of the Ethiopian state. Thus with a legitimate title bestowed by a descendant of the Solomonid dynasty, Ras Abebe could with all due honours proceed to grant military titles to his deserving patriots. In this manner new ones could be recruited and old ones kept morally satisfied. The prestige of Ras Abebe increased as the caretaker and protector of a young king from the House of Solomon. In addition, Ras Abebe sent messages repeatedly to the people of Addis Ababa about his plans to attack the city.[86] There has been no evidence of Ras Abebe attacking Addis Ababa, but his messages could well have functioned as reminders to the inhabitants of an alternative career. Ras Abebe Aregai secured his base of operations through continuous battles against those appointed as chiefs or suspected as collaborators with the Italian administration.[87] The difficult terrain, Italian attempts at total disarmament and their indiscriminate practice of revenge worked in favour of the patriots. The policy of confiscation of arms was extremely impopular, since it ran counter to the cultural aspirations of the Ethiopian warriors. Moreover, the Italians failed to pay adequate compensation.[88]

Resistance in Gojjam and Beghemedir was not as tightly organized as that of Shoa, although the patriots of Beghemedir elected Lij Youhannes Eyasu to be their king and Hailu Belew to be the King of Gojjam.[89]

For the Ethiopian church as well as for the surviving higher nobility, Italian power deserved allegiance as if it were indigenous. This was largely due to Italian policy towards the leadership of the church and the higher nobility, whereby these were guaranteed financial security. The problem of sharing some power with the Ethiopian higher nobility might have surfaced in the future, but by the end of 1940, the eve of Italian entry into the Second World War, those who submitted remained loyal to Italy. The lower nobility on the other hand perceived the colonial state as completely foreign to the country's political and cultural tradition. In the countryside, Italian attempts at direct rule posed an immediate threat to the lower nobility's socio-economic structures. To judge from the few written sources available, the patriots did not fight for the restoration of the state under Haile Selassie, but for the continuation of a way of life otherwise threatened by the new order. To this extent, Ethiopian resistance was conservative, since its primary aim was the preservation of a traditional socio-political system. The fact that the new power was that of Ferenj (European) instead of indigenous did not seem to have been a significant motive for rebellion. In the Shoan document to the poeple of Gojjam, the patriots described the Italians as a common threat to land and religion. What is, however, meant by land is not the country as a whole but the locality, i.e., village, or district or region where traditional existence was threatened. The patriots fought local wars for local goals. The patriots in Shoa fought in order to resolve the problems created by the Italians in Shoa.

The same could be said of the other resitance areas. Most of the resistance leaders fought in their own regions, with the express purpose of maintaining their local autonomy. In Gojjam Dejach Manghesha Jemberie, Dejach Negash and Dejach Belai Zelake fought as much among themselves as against the Italians. Rivalry and the distribution of power after the defeat of the Italians or after negotiated settlement kept them from close cooperation. In Begheme-dir and Galla Sidama, the patriots resisted the Italians in the same manner and for the same reasons as their Shoan and Gojjam compatriots. Resistance was multiethnic, but fortunately for the Italians it had not reached a national level. The attempt on Graziani's life in February 19, 1937 in Addis Ababa can be cited as an example of multiethnic response to the new system, albeit at a micro level. The attempt that wounded more than forty people, some seriously, was carried out by two Eritreans, one Amhara, a Guraghe and one Oromo. In fact, according to the police report of February 22, 1937, the bomb that wounded Graziani was thrown by the Guraghe Mohamed Seid.[90] On a wider level the Oromos of southern Shoa led by Fitewraris Olana, Radunza and Gheleta, described as the most dangerous rebel forces in the area, discredited Graziani's depiction of the 'Gallas' as the implacable enemies of the Amharas. In a secret letter to Ras Hailu, the Oromo patriots Olana, Radunza and Gheleta tried to persuade him to join their cause. The Oromo patriots informed Ras Hailu that there was a power vacuum in the country and that he was the most appropriate person for the task of becoming an emperor of Ethiopia. Ras Hailu was reminded of his background and also of the fact that he had as much right to the Ethiopian throne as the Emperors Teodros and Yohannes. Then the Oromo patriots asked the Ras why he had so far stood aside while the foreigners were ruling 'our own country'. 'Why does the Ras betray his own Ethiopia?' The patriots concluded their message by expressing their readiness to serve under him.[91]

Whereas the Ethiopian patriots fought by and large local wars for local goals, the Eritrean patriots who were widely spread all over Ethiopia fought against Italian presence in Ethiopia. A brief discussion of the Eritrean patriots is warranted for at least two reasons. Firstly, Italian sources attribute considerable importance to Eritrean patriotic activities, and secondly, no attempt has been made thus far to assess the role of the Eritrean patriots. The bulk of the patriots from Eritrea was made up of a series of defections during the 1935-36 war.[92] By the end of 1936 there could have been between 2000 to 2500 Eritrean patriots dispersed all over Ethiopia. The motive for their defection was that they did not want to fight with the foreigners against their country and king. Unlike the other patriots operating in their home areas, the Eritreans operated in foreign and oftentimes hostile areas. Patriots operating in their home areas could very easily resume non-combatant life once the Italians had moved to other rebel spots. In fact rebel forces expanded and contracted according to the popularity of the leader, the strength of the enemy, the chances of victory and, most important of all, according to the season.

Patriots from Eritrea on the other hand had either to go into exile or to continue to fight. Most of them joined established groups and were known for their uncompromising stand against the Italians.[93] Ras Desta Damtew would have submitted much earlier and thus saved his life if it had not been for the opposi-

tion of the Eritrean patriots. Ras Desta was in effect a hostage of Eritrean patriots. They played the same role with other leaders, notably Dejach Menghesa Jemberie of Gojjam. Due to their knowledge of modern armaments and Italian colonial wars, the patriots from Eritrea functioned as a sort of select corps within the Ethiopian resistance movement. Operating throughout the Ethiopian highlands with the exception of Eritrea,[94] the patriots fought against the legitimacy of Italian rule over Ethiopia. To this extent, the contradiction between Italian colonialism and Eritrean patriots was more articulate than, for instance, between the Shoan or Gojjam patriots vis-a-vis Italian colonialism. When in the beginning of 1941 the British allowed Emperor Haile Selassie to enter Ethiopia and engage the Italians in Gojjam, over fifty percent of his small army was composed of Eritrean patriots.[95] The Italian East African Empire was created and to a great extent maintained by Italian arms and the colonial (mainly Eritrean) army.[96] The same empire was, however, undermined, though perhaps not to an equal degree, by the Eritrean deserters. The Eritreans were instrumental in the construction of the empire as well as in its destruction.

The Italians accused foreign intelligence agencies for the spread of Ethiopian resistance in general and for acts of sabotage in particular. The British intelligence appeared to be omnipresent in Ethio-Italian confrontations. Despite continuous allegations, the Graziani papers contain very little substantial evidence. Ethiopian patriots had hardly any foreign assistance, as can be gathered from British intelligence surveys of 1939-40. The earliest contact between the patriots of Gojjam and the external world began towards the end of 1939 when three Italian members of Comintern (Communist International) arrived in Gojjam. While two died soon after their arrival, the third member, known by the name of Paul, remained until March 1940.[97] In Gojjam Paul tried, without any success, to unite the rival patriotic groups and coordinate their activities. He also established a printing press and trained three young Ethiopians to function as editors and printers. Paul, according to G.L. Steer, left for Europe together with Lorenzo Taezaz, the private secretary of Emperor Haile Selassie, who was on a survey mission in Gojjam from summer 1939 to March 1940. During the second half of 1939, assessing the international climate, the French decided to send a one-man mission to Ethiopia.[98] R. Monnier, the French intelligence officer, only managed to write a few letters from Gojjam before his death of fever towards the end of the year. R. Pankhurst's extensive oral research among Italians in Addis Ababa produced the names of two other Italians who joined the patriots in Gojjam.[99] Between 1936-40 there were no more than six Europeans attempting to assist the Ethiopians in one way or another in their resitance.

The fluctuating number of the patriots makes it difficult to assess their numerical size. Estimations, for instance, of Ras Abebe Aregai's forces ranging from 10,000 to 30,000 are far too high, especially when compared with the Italian figures. What made the resistance intractable was that it was spread over a wide area and it expanded or contracted according to the seasons and according to the Italian pacification praxis. By 1940, when the British through the Sanford Mission carried out a military intelligence survey inside of the rebel strongholds of Gojjam, there might have been between 10,000 and 15,000 hard-core patriots throughout the empire. The patriots were most certainly greater in number at the

end of 1937 and throughout 1938. The continued war of destruction carried out by the colonial army and the new policy of the Duke [100] had weakened the resitance bloc. By September 1939 the Shoan rebels were in no position to reject the offer of ceasefire and conditional submission made by the vice governor general.[101] In Gojjam, although the patriots were relatively in a stronger position, they had ceased to attack enemy garrisons, while the Italians, making use of internal intelligence, strengthened their offensive capabilities. In addition to their ca. 300 bombers and sufficient supply of poison gas, the Italians had a colonial army of ca. 100,000 pursuing the 'rebels'. Moreover, the colonial army, dominated by the Eritreans during the early years, became more diversified in ethnic composition and also more competent in carrying out its tasks.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the Italians had the upper hand in their war against the patriots. Th ough the cost of pacification both in terms of casualties and budget was of sufficient concern, there were no signs in Italy of shortage of manpower and material for the empire. For the financial and arms industrial sector of the economy, Italian African imperialism was a welcome respite from the crises arising from the Great Depression.[102] The colonial as well as the metropolitan army expanded during the 1939-40 period largely in anticipation of the war. On the diplomatic front, the Italians had acquired recognition of their conquest of Ethiopia from the powers which had the potential to undermine Italian colonization, mainly France and Britain. For the Ethiopian patriots, it became more and more clear that they would not defeat the Italians unless they secured assistance from the enemies of Italy. Survival of Ethiopian resistance and eventually its success depended entirely on whether Italy fought with or against the allies.

The Second World War in the Horn of Africa began in earnest on June 10, 1940 when Italy, after ten months of belligerent neutrality, declared war on France and Britain. The French were by then out of action and the British, despite the Sanford Mission, taken by surprise! The British soon proceeded to revitalize Ethiopian resistance, mainly that in Gojjam, and five months after the declaration of war a great part of Gojjam was completely outside of Italian control. Italian failure to attack Malta and Egypt, thus securing the Suez Canal communication line, made their defeat a foregone conclusion. Ethiopian resitance and its quick revival enabled Britain to achieve an easy victory.

FOOTNOTES

1. A. Sbacchi, 'Italian Colonialism in Ethiopia, 1936-1940'. Ph.D. diss. Univ. of Chicago, 1975, pp. 6, 127, 181, 218-222, 302, and 424. Cf. Rochat, G., "L'attentato a Graziani e la repressione italiana in Etiopia nel 1936-37," **Italia Contemporranea**, 118 (1975), pp. 5 and 38.

2. A. Del Boca, **Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale.** 3 vols. 1976-1981. Departing from a normative standpoint that Italy had no right whatever to colonize other nations, the author documented, with due sensibility to the complex nature of the phenomenon as played out by individuals, the violent, undemocratic and exploitative side of Italian colonialism.

3. Prememoria di Mussolini per Badoglio, Commander in Chief of the Italian Armed Forces, Rome, 30 December 1934, a copy of which is included in G. Rochat, **Militari e politici nella perparazione della Compagna d'Ethiopia: studi e documenti, 1932-36**, 1971, pp. 376-379.

4. A. Del Boca, op.cit.

5. A. Sbacchi, op.cit.

6. R. Pankhurst, "The Ethiopian Patriots and the collapse of Italaian Rule in East Africa"; "The Ethiopian Patriots: The lone struggle, 1936-1940 in **Ethiopian Observer**, vol. 12 (1969):2 and vol. 13 (1970):1, respectively. G.E. Salome, "The Ethiopian Patriots, 1936-1941," in **Ethiopian Observer**, vol. 12 (1969):2. In the Ethiopian language the most notable is **Kerin Geremew: The story of Ethiopian patriots**, by Tadesse Zewelde, Addis Ababa, 1968/69.

7. Sbacchi has in his "Ethiopian Opposition to Italian Rule, 1936-1940," in **Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Ethiopian Studies,** Chicago 1978 used the same approach. The author has in my opinion not succeeded in explaining the logic of Italian colonial policies and the various phases and forms of Ethiopian resistance.

8. Prememoria di Mussolini per Bagdoglio... December 30, 1934, op.cit.

9. Ibid.

10. Mussolini to Graziani, May 20, 1936 and Lessona to Graziani, June 15, 1936 in Archivo Centrale di Stato, Fondo Graziani. Rudolfo Graziani ruled from May 20, 1936 until December 24, 1937. His papers, including copies of practically every correspondence between him and Rome, were confiscated by Allies soon after the war and deposited in the Archivo Centrale di Stato in Rome, henceforth designated as F.G. In 1982 the Graziani papers were reorganized, which meant that the 1982 file numbers do not correspond with post 1982.

11. G. Rochat, "L'attentato a Graziani...", p. 6.

12. The major pacification policies such as "no power to the rases", the elimination of the young educated Ethiopians, the summary execution of captured rebels, the exercise of terror multiplied ten-fold originated from Mussolini, the head of the state. The Ministry of Colonies, conveyed elaborated and refined the directives of the Duce.

13. F.G., Busta 29, File 29, sub-file 33, Mussolini to Graziani, June 5, 1936.

14. F.G., Busta 29, File 29, sub-file 33, Mussolini to Graziani, July 8, 1936; D. Poggiali, **Diario Africa Orientale Italiana**, dal. 15.6.1936 al 4.10.1937, Milano 1971, p. 69.

15. That the Italian armed forces could use poison gas was contemplated as early as 1934 in Mussolini's Prememoria to Badoglio cited above. Italians attached great importance to the poison gas weapon between November 1935 and February 1936 when the outcome of the Ethio-Italian War was unpredictable. Cf. F. Bandini, **Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale: Storia delle guerra coloniali 1882-1943**, 1980, pp. 352-353. Although Graziani had a standing order to implement the use of gas, Mussolini reminded him of its usefulness as a means for speady pacification. The last directive from Mussolini for the use of gas against the Shoan, "rebels" was made on March 14, 1940. Cf. D. De Biase, **L'impero di facetta Nera**, Milano 1966, pp. 140-141.

16. They were divided into 358,000 Italians and 108,000 colonials. Of these, between 50 and 60,000 were from Eritrea while the rest were from Lybia and Somalia. Governo Generale dell' Africa Orientale Italiana, **Il primo anno dell'impero**, Addis Ababa 1938 vol. 1. Text, p. 44.

17. Del Boca, **Gli Italiani**, vol. 3, pp. 26-38.

18. Del Boca, **Gli Italiani**, vol. 3, pp. 51-76.

19. Ibid., p. 48.

20. The Kassa brothers and Ras Desta Damtew were by the end of September willing to surrender as a result of continuous harassment from Italian forces.

21. F.G. Busta 47, file 42, The Kassa brothers to Graziani, September 30, 1936. Graziani commented that the Kassa brothers wanted to make a feudal submission according to the old (Ethiopian) style. More elaborate terms for submission were, however, those of Ras Desta Damtew. Cf. F.G. Busta 42, file 34, Relazione Castagna, (the unsuccessful mediator) dated October 16, 1937.

22. See footnote 15 above.

23. Most often the Italians described the enemy losses in very vague terms such as many, hundreds, over a thousand, etc.

24. Italian casualties 230 dead and wounded; colonials 350 dead and 740 wounded, in Governo Generale dell'Africa Orientale, **Il primo anno**, vol. 1, Text, p. 193.

25. F.G., busta 29, file 29, sub-file 33. Mussolini to Graziani, February 20, 1937.

26. Rochat, "L'attentato a Graziani...", p. 31; Del Boca, **Gli Italiani**, vol. 3, p. 203.

27. Cf. Del Boca, **Gli Italiani**, vol. 3, p. 88; C. Stanford, **Ethiopia under Haile Selassie**, London 1946, p. 93 where the figure is put over 6000.

28. F.G., Busta 29, file 29, sub-file 33, Lessona to Graziani, July 10, 1936.

29. Rochat, "L'attentato a Graziani...", p. 24.

30. F.G., Busta 41-42, Olivieri to Graziani. Relazione riasuntiva circa l'attentato del 19.2.1937, April 19, 1937.

31. F.G., Busta 48, file 42, Maletti to Graziani, May 27, 1937; Cf. Del Boca, **Gli Italiani...**" p. 106.

32. This took place during the first weeks of June 1936. Cf. F.G., Busta 29, file 29, sub-file 33, Mussolini to Graziani, June 8, 1936.

33. F.G., Busta 48, file 42, Maletti to Graziani, May 27, 1937.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. Del Boca, **Gli Italiani...**", vol. 3, pp. 106-126. The province of Shoa ceased to exist by virtue of the political reorganization of June 1936. In a reform of November 1938, Shoa became a province again.

37. Del Boca, **Gli Italiani...**, vol. 2, p. 321; F.G., Busta 35 file 31, sub-file 4, Graziani to Rome, September 15, 1937.

38. Ibid.

39. F.G., Busta 29, file 29, sub-file 33: Le operazioni nel Mens dal 17 dicembre al 9 Gennaio 1938.

40. Ibid.

41. F.G., Busta 47, file 42: relazione riservatissima sulle cause alla ribellione nel Amara, dated October 28, 1937.

42. F.G., Busta 36, file 31: Dej. Negash to governor of the province of Amara, November 13, 1937.

43. Ras Hailu, son of King Tecle Haimanot of Gojjam, remained a close ally of Italy throughout the period.

44. F.G., Busta 47, file 42, sub-file 1 b, Graziani to Mussolini, December 21, 1937.

45. F.G., Busta 29, file 29, sub-file 33: Governo Generale dell' A.O.I. Stato Maggiore - Ufficio Perazione, Addis Ababa, January 4, 1938.

46. Del Boca, **Gli Italiani**, vol. 3, pp. 173-191.

47. F.G., Busta 29, file 29, sub-file 33: Lessona to Graziani, August 27, 1937.

48. The figure is derived from Graziani's daily despatches found dispersed among his papers.

49. Italian colonialism had two phases. The first phase was the complete pacification of the empire. Pacification meant absolute political domination over the subjects of the new empire. The second phase was to employ the necessary capital, technology and labour in the colony for the interest of the metropole.

50. The main source for the policy of the Duke is E.A. Scaglione's biography, **Amedeo, Duca d'Aosta,** Rome 1953. The author was a colonial functionary in Addis Ababa at the period of the Duke and is currently (1984) employed as a consultant in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The monograph is written with a great deal of sympathy. The author had access to archival material and has based his narration on them. His interpretations leave no doubt that the long-term colonial policy of the Duke was the establishment of relations very similar to apartheid.

51. Del Boca, **Gli Italiani**, vol. 3, pp. 313-333.

52. Scaglione, **Amedeo, Duca**, p. 135.

53. Ibid.

54. R.D. (Royal Decree) of November 11, 1938.

55. Scaglione, **Amedeo, Duca**, pp. 140-141, 167-169.

56. F.G., Busta 40, file 33, sub-file 5, Graziani to Ministry of Italian Africa, December 14, 1937; Poggiali, **Diario**, p. 179.

57. ASMAI (Archivio Storico del Ministero dell'Africa Italiana) Position 181/46, file 218, Lessona to Graziani, October 7, 1937; Scaglione, **Amedeo, Duca...**, p. 140; Del Boca, **Gli Italiani**, vol. 3, p. 231; Sbacchi, **Italian Colonialism...**, p. 150, 261.

58. Scaglione, **Amedeo, Duca...**, p. 140.

59. Poggiali, **Diario...**, p. 179.

60. Del Boca, **Gli Italiani**, vol. 3, pp. 258-259.

61. F.G., Busta 40, file 33, sub-file 5, Graziani to Ministry of Italian Africa, December 14, 1937.

62. Del Boca, **Gli Italiani**, vol. 3, p. 312.

63. Scaglione, **Amedeo, Duca...**, p. 169.

64. Ibid., p. 170.

65. Ibid.

66. Mondaini, **La legislazione coloniale italiana nel suo sviluppo storico e nel suo stato attuale, 1881-1940**, Milano 1941, pp. 410-416.

67. Del Boca, **Gli Italiani**, vol 3, p, 240.

68. Cf. J. Dugan and L. Lafore, **Days of Emperor and clown: The Italo-Ethiopian war, 1935-36**, New York, pp. 324-25.

69. Cf. Sbacchi, **Italian colonialism...**, p. 302.

70. The Italians had eliminated it in Eritrea and Somalia through their native education policy whereby natives could stay in school only up to four years, thus controlling their intellectual as well as political development. Cf. R. De Marco, **The Italianization of African Natives: Italian Colonial Educational Policy**, New York, 1943.

71. M. Hailey, **African Survey**, London 1945, pp. 527-542; cf. even P. Hetherington, **British Paternalism and Africa**, London 1978, pp. 110-130.

72. J. Dugan and L. Lafore, **Days of Emperor...**, pp. 324-325; Sbacchi, **Italian Colonialism...**, p. 302.

73. Del Boca, **Gli Italiani**, vol. 3, p. 245.

74. Ibid., p. 249.

75. G. Ciano, **Diario, 1939-1943**, vol. 1, p. 61.

76. The numerical size of the Italian armed forces increased from 218,000 men in the beginning of 1938 to ca. 300,000 by the end of 1939. According to Bandini, **Gli Italiani...**, p. 400, the strength of Italian forces in East Africa was over 500,000.

77. Del Boca, **Gli Italiani**, vol. 3, pp. 106-127.

78. A translation of the letter exists in F.G., busta 36, file 31, sub-file 12, dated Addis Ababa, November 9, 1937.

79. Ibid.

80. Poggiali, **Diario...**, p. 257.

81. F.G., busta 36, file 31, sub-file 12, Graziani to provincial governors, Addis Ababa, November 9, 1937.

82. F.G., busta 29, file 32, Graziani to Ministry of Italian Africa, December 18, 1937.

83. F.G., busta 40, file 33, sub-file 2, Ras Hailu to Graziani, December 2, 1937.

84. F.G., busta 36, file 31, Seble Wengel Hailu to Ras Hailu, n.d.

85. F.G., busta 35, file 31, sub-file 4, Asmara to Addis Ababa, Asmara, September 15, 1937; Del Boca, **Gli Italiani**, vol. 3, p. 321. During this period Italian sources reveal that Haile Selassie approached the Italians and proposed a political solution. It is most probable that Haile Selassie must have been aware that there were others who could easily trace their geneaology to King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Del Boca, pp. 303-306.

86. Poggiali, **Diario...**, p. 229.

87. F.G., busta 37, file 32, sub-file 1, Graziani to Ministry of Italian Africa, September 18, 1937.

88. Scaglione, **Amedeo, Duca...**, p. 136.

89. F.G., busta 35, file 31, sub-file 6, Graziani to Ministry of Italian Africa, September 18, 1937.

90. F.G., busta 48, file 42. Olivieri to Graziani, February 22, 1937.

91. F.G., busta 40, file 33, sub-file 5, Graziani to Ministry of Italian Africa, December 14, 1937.

92. Del Boca, **Gli Italiani**, vol. 2, pp. 514-516, 415.

93. F.G., busta 40, file 33, Castagna to Graziani, October 22, 1937.

94. The Italians had, through collective punishment, efficient intelligence network and harsh detention measures, pacified Eritrea.

95. R. Pankhurst, "The Ethiopian Patriots...", p. 102; G. Steer, **Sealed and Delivered**, London 1942, p. 26.

96. Del Boca, **La Guerra d'Abissinia, 1935-41**. Third edition, Milan 1978, pp. 181-182.

97. G. Steer, op.cit., pp. 16-17.

98. Y. Jouin, "La Partecipation francaise y la resistance ethiopienne, 1936-1940," **Revue historique de l'Armee**, 19 (1963):4, pp. 149-162.

99. Del Boca, **Gli Italiani**, vol. 3, p. 337.

100. Steer, op.cit., p. 41; Del Boca **Gli Itaiani**, vol. 3, pp. 332-333.

101. Tadesse Zewelde, **Kerin Geremew: The story of the Ethiopian Patriots**, Addis Ababa, 1968/69, pp. 167-179.

102. G. Maione, **L'imperialismo Straccione: Classi sociali e finanza di guerra dall´impresa etiopica al conflitto mondiale, 1935-1943**, 1979, pp. 124-143.

HISTORIANS AND ERITREAN HISTORY: A REVIEW ARTICLE

Richard Sherman, **Eritrea: The Unfinished Revolution.** Praeger, 1980. David Pool, **Eritrea, Africa's Longest War**, Anti-Slavery Society, Human Rights Series, Report No. 3. London: 1980. Basil Davidson, Lionel Cliffe and Bereket Habte Selassie, eds., **Behind the War in Eritrea.** Spokesman. London: 1980. Bereket Habte Selassie, **Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa.** Monthly Review Press, 1980.

Introduction

As the Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict enters its third decade, the Eritrean position has during the last five years assumed clarity. The Eritrean Fronts argue that their struggle is primarily anti-colonial: Ethiopia, they argue, without any valid claim over all or parts of Eritrea, succeeded in imposing its colonial rule over Eritrea with the active connivance of Britain and the U.S. Secondly, the Eritrean Fronts argue that the Eritrean people seek to implement their right to self-determination, a right denied when the U.N. resolved to federate the ex-colony with Ethiopia in 1950. The Eritrean Fronts in general and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) in particular also consider that they are conducting a revolutionary war with the aim of transforming the neo-colonial entity into a socialist-oriented state. Furthermore, the Eritrean Fronts insist that despite a discontinuous history prior to 1890, the Eritrean people today are united in the fight for independence, because they have been forged into a nation by the contradictory phases of colonialism. Eritrean nationalism owes its origin and development to the exploitative colonial system. [1] With varying degrees of emphasis, this position is endorsed by the authors under review. Since the most crucial issue concerns the characterization of the Eritrean uprising as colonial or anti-Ethiopian, the reviewer will consider history as a guide to clarity and understanding. [2] Owing to lack of space and their secondary importance, the themes of right to self-determination and the socialist orientation will not be thorougly examined.

Format and Content Outline of the Books under Review

Richard Sherman's book, originally a Ph.D. dissertation, contains six chapters and about thirty pages of appendix material. The aim of the author was to gain a deeper insight into the history and practice of the Eritrean liberation movements. Throughout his book, the author has tried to tackle the issues that are considered crucial by the Eritrean protagonists, and only in the final chapter does he discuss the role of the superpowers and Cuba in this region. The pre-colonial and colonial history is treated in Chapter

1. Chapters 2 and 3 deal with the history of the two main movements, namely the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and the EPLF. The revolutionary aspect of the movements as 'the Eritrean Alternative' is discussed in chapter 4. A highly speculative exposition on the prospects for an independent Eritrea is taken on in the fifth chapter. Some of the appendix material on Ethio-U.S. relations is extremely useful and has not previously been published. The volume could be described as sympathetic to the cause of Eritrean independence.

David Pool's small booklet resulted from a controversial study commissioned by the Anti-Slavery Society in London. In seven brief chapters, Pool seeks to explain the history of Eritrea prior to colonization, colonial history, British military rule, the federation and its subversion, Ethiopian manoeuvres to gain international support for its policy on Eritrea and, finally, the Eritrean political and military opposition. Two appendices on the right of the Eritrean people to self-determination and the Policy Declaration of the (Ethiopian) provisional Military Government to solve the problem in Eritrea are included.

Behind the War in Eritrea is a collection of papers read in a symposium organized in 1979 by Bereket Habte Selassie, et al. and War on Want. The aim of the symposium, as expressed by the volume's editors and more forcefully by Basil Davidson, was do demonstrate to those persons, parties and movements that the Eritrean revolution as crystallized in its most developed form , that is in the EPLF, deserves close attention and active support. The symposium was organized around three themes, each reflected in the book. Part I is devoted to the theme of Eritrea's historical claims to nationhood, as asserted by Basil Davidson, Richard Greenfield and Bereket Habte Selassie for the period up to 1962. The second theme, the nature of the liberation struggle, is confronted in Part II. The main emphases of the four essays concern the organizational capabilities of the EPLF, Ethiopian strocities in Eritrea and the nature of external involvement, particularly that of the Soviet Union in Ethiopia and Eritrea. The third theme deals with the Socialist revolution in Eritrea, and is defined by three papers in Part III.

Although the editors did not write a conclusion, the unity of the themes and their messages are clearly discernible: the Eritrean people are waging an anti-conlonial war and/or are struggling to implement their right to self-determination; and the Eritrean revolution, as characterized by the EPLF, is a liberation struggle capable of transforming the society. The EPLF will build new social, cultural, political and economic structures 'from the base' by means of which Eritreans will take power within their own hands and govern themselves.[3)]

The last book, **Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa**, is written by an Eritrean, Bereket Habte Selassie, who, for at least a decade before his involvement in the 'Eritrean anti-colonial struggle', was a high-ranking Ethiopian official in the Ministry of Justice, even becoming Imperial Ethiopia's Attorney General. This book aims to provide more information on the anti-colonial nature of the Eritrean struggle and to demonstrate the reasons why the Ethiopian empire must be transformed. Transformation will, according to the author, most likely come through the success of

the 'Eritrean freedom fighters' and the continued wars of liberation in Tigray, Ogaden and among the Oromo (**Conflict and Intervention,** p. 171). The foundations of the Ethiopian empire state and the implications of the revolution are treated in Part I. Eritrea as 'a forgotten colonial struggle', the Oromo and Tigray wars of national liberation and Somalia's lost territories are extensively discussed in chapters three to five. The book concludes with an historical presentation of the politics of intervention by big powers as well as the neighboring countries.

History and the Colonial Issue

Basil Davidson and Eritrean History

Behind the War in Eritrea is introduced by Davidson's brief paper, "Eritrea: An Historical Note." In view of Davidson's contribution to African history, his article on Eritrea deserves close scrutiny. [4] In the first paragraph Davidson introduces the Eritreans as if they had a common political and cultural history and concludes that they 'were subject to none of their neighbors' (p. 11). On the contrary, the evidence for the pre-colonial history of the region is plentiful and clear. [5] Half of the population of Eritrea constituted an integral part of the Abyssinian (Ethiopian) state. Whether such common cultural and political history is sufficient to establish a claim is another question. But to argue against any dependency amounts to the serious fallacy of overlooking facts to suit a desired interpretation.

While discussing Rome's slow penetration into the highlands, Davidson wrote that the Italians 'did not find pushing inland easy, being stiffly defeated by the Eritreans in 1887'. Once again Davidson seems to have deliberately decided to read the history of the period in a manner that would legitimate the EPLF as an anti-colonial liberation movement. The northern frontiers of Ethiopia were demarcated several years before the abortive efforts of Italian expansion through a treaty between Ethiopia and Great Britain. In this treaty Britain was acting on behalf of Egypt. During the 1872-1889 period, the center of the Ethiopian state was Axum in Tigray. When the Italians began to expand into the Abyssinian highlands, it was well understood that they were violating Ethiopian territorial integrity which they had undertaken to respect. [6] And in the ensuing battle of Dogali (1887) the confrontation was not between the Eritreans and the Italians but between the Ethiopian state and Italian imperialism. The Eritreans from the highlands, i.e., the Abyssinians in Eritrea, did of course contribute their share. However, to try to present such important historical tradition as entirely Eritrean can only serve the purpose of sustaining an already formed opinion.

Davidson continues to make his case by arguing the fact of living together 'within the frontiers which were now defined as those of a separate entity, Eritrea, gave them a new sense of common fate and of incipient nationhood' (p. 12). It is undeniably true that common (colonial or otherwise) experiences may contribute to inchoate nationhood. However, colonial experience alone, as African history amply demonstrates, has not been found a sustaining force for African nationalism. In the case of Eritrea, Italian

colonialism remains almost an entirely unresearched field. From the sketchy knowledge that we possess, the impact of colonialism on Eritrean "nationalism" before 1935 was of hardly any significance. Eritrea was only effectively colonized between 1935 and 1940. [7] Wheteher this brief period could be said to have produced an incipient nationalism and nationhood is a proposition that has to be studied closely. In countries like Nigeria and Ghana, where British colonialism in its mature form reigned for a longer period, the sense of 'common fate and incipient nationhood' was extremely weak indeed. Nation states in Africa continue to exist not because of the resilience of African nationalism but because of the concerted efforts of those powers that decided the political destiny of Africa in collaboration with African ruling classes.

Davidson continues the theme of common nationhood and common nationalism on page thirteen by remarking that towards the end of outright colonial rule and in the period of British provisional government, the constellation of nationalities began to come to terms with the concept of common nationhood. It is unfortunate that the only source available on the British period in Eritrea (1941-1952) is that of Trevaskis. This book is flawed in its biased documentation of British intentions in Eritrea and in its underestimation of the various political forces in the region. Even so, it is not clear whether Davidson has consulted it. At any rate, the outline of Trevaskis' work makes it clear that there was neither a common sense of nationhood nor an incipent nationalism in Eritrea during the British period. [8]

Davidson, having established to his own satisfaction the bases of Eritrean nationalism and nationhood, continues the story into the federation period, reminding his readers that the U.N. resolution was for 'federation and not complete absorption' (p. 14). A close reading of the Federal Act of 1950, however, makes it clear that Eritrea was to all intents and purposes united with the empire of Ethiopia. From 1952 onwards, the Eritrean people shared a common fate with the Ethiopians. The violation of the Federal Act, initiated by the Eritrean Assembly several years before Addis Ababa's full annexation, [9] is taken by Davidson as additional evidence of Ethiopian imperialism in action. 'From 1962 onwards,' writes Davidson, 'the Ethiopian regime governed or attempted to govern Eritrea along straightforward colonial lines' (p. 14). The introduction of Amhara authority at all decisive points, the suppression of education, the exclusion of any specific Eritrean identity and the use of military force are, according to Davidson, sufficient to characterize the Ethiopian possession of Eritrea as qualitatively not different from any other 'colonial enclosure' (p. 14). While one might agree with Davidson that, in the process of dismantling the federation, the Eritreans lost a number of political rights, his conclusion about the colonial relationship is based on a number of untenable premises.

First, Davidson misconstrued Eritrean pre-colonial history; second, on the basis of a self-serving and untenable hypothesis, he assumed the existence of Eritrean nationhood and nationalism; third he failed to examine the British period where, to use his words, incipient nationhood and nationalism were put to the test; fourth, he failed to draw a distinction between the conflict that arises out of the oppression of minority groups (Eritreans, the Oromos, etc.) in a state and the suppression of colonial peoples

by an external, governing power.

Bereket Habte Selassie

In a language that is far less dogmatic, but no less biased, Bereket Habte Selassie also attempts to explain the anti-colonial nature of the Eritrean 'struggle'. Whereas his contribution to **Behind the War in Eritrea** deals with the 1941-1962 period, an entire chapter of **Conflict and Intervention** is devoted to the pre-colonial and colonial history of Eritrea. Bereket, after commenting on the exclusively northern character of the Auxumite period (c. 1st century A.D. to the 10th century), tries to gloss over the subsequent aspects of pre-colonial history more through rhetoric than by use of rigorous argumentation. According to Bereket, since the 15th century, 'the Amhara, who came to be known as the Abyssinians, were able to establish a tenuous rule over the Eritrean highlanders (Abyssinians) - tenuous because the people were geographically isolated and unaccustomed to outside rule, fiercely nationalistic and stubbornly resisted Abyssinian attempts to rule them.' (**Conflict and Intervention**, p. 49).

Indeed the rule was tenuous. In those centuries, no rule from Ethiopia's distant capitals (most of which were in northern Shoa and, later, from the mid-17th century, in Gondar) could have been thorough and consistent. The next question is, did the Eritrean highlanders throughout these centuries stubbornly resist Amhara attempts to rule them? The evidence for resistance is hard to come by. It is true that there were periods, for example, 1785 to 1855, when the Abyssinian districts of Eritrea were ruled from Tigray rather than from Gondar. But there were much longer periods when the imperial center governed the Abyssinian districts in Eritrea peacefully. These are disregarded by Bereket.

He continues his distortion of the past by writing:

> The Central Eritrean highlanders and neighboring northern Abyssinians worked together to resist alien incursions, but this cooperation was undermined by the Abyssinian ambition to expand to Eritrea. (**Conflict and Intervention**, p. 50.)

It is incumbent upon those who embark upon writing the history of the region to consult the readily available source material. In the Eritrean case, there is not much available, but even the most obvious source escapted Bereket. He did not even consult J. Kolmodin, **Traditiones de Tsazzega et Hazzega** (Rome, 1912), a thoroughly prepared collection of oral tradition on the history of the Abyssinian people in Eritrea.[10] In the almost three centuries that are covered by the book, there is only a single instance of a conflict pertaining to the allocation of power between the Abyssinian districts of Eritrea and the imperial center at Gondar and later at Axum.

The final part of Bereket's argument seeks to prove that Eritrea was not an integral part of Ethiopia but a colony. Emperor Menelik II is accused of allowing the Italians to occupy all of Eritrea by signing the Treaty of Wuchale (1889). Furthermore, Bereket argues that Menelik could have 'chosen to drive the Italians into the sea and occupy the coast himself' (**Conflict and**

Intervention, p. 52). Since he did not, we are bound to conclude that all historical connections were thereby severed. Menelik, it is true, did allow the Italians to occupy Asmara. The Treaty of Wuchale, however, permitted the Italians to occupy only a very small part of the Abyssinian districts in Eritrea.[11] Italian occupation of large parts of Hamassien, the entire district of Serae and Akele-Guzay were undertaken against Menelik's continued opposition. Now, what are the historical implications of the Treaty of Wuchale? Does it mean that Menelik renounced Ethiopia's right to reclaim the land ceded to Italy by virtue of the Treaty of Wuchale or even other, subsequent treaties? European history is replete with examples of lands seized by powerful states form less powerful ones. In the case of Eritrea, whether the areas taken by Italy would continue to remain outside the Ethiopian state depended on the unfolding of colonialism and on the Eritrean people themselves. As will be pointed out in some detail later in the review, the Abyssinians in Eritrea expressed their political will to join Ethiopia fifty years after colonial rule.

Bereket has concentrated solely on the history of the Abyssinian part of Eritrea. The larger part of the region, in terms of area, remained outside the cultural, historical and political atmosphere of Ethiopia. He could have quite easily succeeded in demonstrating that the Ethiopian presence in these parts of Eritrea might have been 'colonial' in the sense that there was no Ethiopian presence here prior to 1952.[12] Instead he found it necessary to concentrate on the Abyssinian region of Eritrea. Since he has not given us any explanation as to why he chose to limit himself, we can only speculate that the 'colonial' argument is at its weakest in regard to the historical relations between the Abyssinians in Eritrea and the rest of the Abyssinian (Ethiopian) state.

Richard Sherman

Sherman's interpretations of pre-colonial history are to be found on pages nine to thirteen. His main source is **In Defence of Eritrean Revolution** (New York 1978) reproduced by Eritreans resident in North America. Sherman opens by stating that the Portuguese in the 16th and 17th centuries and later travellers such as James Bruce in the 18th century identified an area called Medri Bahri - equivalent to modern Eritrea as distinct from Ethiopia (p. 9). Indeed, the travellers did identify an area known as Medri Bahri, but it is, however, far from correct to argue that it was distinct from Ethiopia. In fact, all the travellers and several more, without any exception, stated that Medri Bahri was one of the provinces of Ethiopia.[13] Sherman, instead of checking the sources, decided to rely on a political publication, even if he is uncomfortable with the Eritrean Front's characterization of their struggle as anti-colonial. On page 33, he indicates that the fronts justify their activities by pointing to a host of negative conditions created by the colonial domination: the absence of basic freedoms, a dismal educational system and an elitist socio-economic structure. The conditions are most probably true. However, in order to characterize them as conditions arising from colonial domination, it has to be shown that Addis Abeba imposed them solely on the Eritreans. Under the autocratic Ethiopian regimes, both past and present, basic freedoms have been indiscriminately denied and a dismal educational system imposed on the entire population of Ethiopia. Sherman's resort to history is therefore terminally flawed.

Richard Greenfield

The second historical article in **Behind the War in Eritrea** is that of Richard Greenfield: "Pre-colonial and Colonial History," pp. 16-31. This is a rather long, rambling work on disparate issues such as imperialism in antiquity, nations in medieval times and cursory comparisons of Eritrean history with the history of Africa and Asia. In a sub-section entitled "Imperialism in antiquity," the author tries, among other things, to describe the nature of the Axumite empire, coming to the obvious conclusion that it was a tribute-collecting state (p. 19). He then questions whether the 'Eritreans' were integrated into the Empire state, since the Axumite empire state had fluid boundaries. Greenfield answers by referring to a long quotation from a 4th century inscription in which Ezana, the king of Axum, documented his military expeditions. On the basis of this incomplete evidence, Greenfield concludes that 'the tributary limits of the Axumite state were clearly fluid. This indicates that, as today, the colonized people did not accept that status willingly and Eritreans were among those people '(p. 20).

This reviewer will not argue about the fluid nature of the boundaries, but he objects to the criteria that the author uses to define the existence of unity or disunity. In ancient times, states survived through trade and tribute. From the source cited by Greenfield, the prime concern of the kings (ruling class) was a peaceful flow of trade. Although we do not have sufficient evidence, military expeditions to force payments were most probably the exception rather than the rule. Greenfield's conclusion on the basis of Ezana's inscription, that the Eritreans were among those who did not accept the rule of Axum willingly, can not even be sustained by the same inscription. The quotation, in fact, contradicts Greenfield's concluding statement. Ezana, according to the full text of the inscription, was compelled to cross the Takezze river and destroy Meroe because the people of Meroe had committed acts of violence against the poeple of Hasa and Baria, both of whom are found in modern western Eritrea. While in any imperial state some groups would be more integrated than others, we have to look into the cultural, economic and geographical factors to assess the nature and extent of integration. The author did not find any of these factors important.

David Pool

Pool's summation of pre-colonial history is remarkable indeed. Historical relations between the various regions of Eritrea and Ethiopia are, with slight bias, thoroughly discussed. The author has checked all the relevant sources and used them quite well. As Longrigg had done before, Pool concluded that some parts of Eritrea were historically, culturally and economically linked to Ethiopia. He quite rightly stated that since other regions hardly fell within the sphere of Ethiopian rule, 'the image of millenia of Ethiopian rule is a myth of Solomonic dimension' (p. 20). If there are some weak spots in the reconstruction of the region's history, they are caused by the absence of thoroughly researched studies and the unreliability of available sources. Two significant examples can be taken: first Trevaskis' book is used to throw light on Italian colonialism and consequent confiscation of land

regardless of local objections (p. 18). Second, Italian colonialism is credited with the capacity of forging Eritrean nationalism (p. 17). The first allegation is very hard to sustain, since, after 1897, the Italians were sensitive to the political dangers of indiscriminate land confiscation. As late as 1935, there were not more than 70 Italian farmers cultivating about 6,500 acres.[14] Italian attempts to settle colonists in the Eritrean highlands failed largely because of the belligerancy of the local population. A compromise was found in 1926, whereby the entire eastern lowlands were declared state land ready for colonist settlement. Since this area was not, however, suitable for colonist settlement, the rights of the pastoral communities were in practice never infringed. The second sweeping statement that Italian colonialism created Eritrean nationalism can at best be taken as an insubstantial assertion in the absence of even a single study on Italian colonialism in Eritrea.[15]

The manner in which the pre-colonial and colonial history is approached indicates that the interpretations were heavily inclined towards the position of the Eritrean Fronts. Pool's chapter constitutes the only exception. It is not within the scope of this review to offer explanations about the possible causes of such a subjective approach. It is, however, clear that in as far as the Eritrean Fronts are concerned, the re-writing of history in the light of the Front's political goal (i.e., independence) is an extremely useful weapon. Without historical legitimation, there could be no ELF and EPLF waging an 'anti-colonial' struggle. This realization is certainly the underlying assumption of the editors of **Behind the War in Eritrea** and the author of **Conflict and Intervention.**

Federation and its Aftermath

Federation

The 1941-52 period is no less controversial than the preceding one. Although the historical outline is clearer, a number of contentious interpretations have been put forward. The most important questions that need to be raised are: How did the federation come about? What role did Ethiopia play in the U.N. Resolution of 1950 that federated Eritrea to Ethiopia? Bereket Habte Selassie in **Behind the War in Eritrea**, Sherman and Pool have attempted a reconstruction of the events that led to federation.

To the essentially Trevaskian story, Bereket adds the international dimension, such as the waning power of Great Britain, the Korean War and Ethio-U.S. alliance as decisive factors.[16] Bereket, however, completely ignores the role which the political forces in Eritrea (the Unionists vis-a-vis the Independence bloc) played in the destiny of their country. The Eritreans are seen as helpless pawns. In 1948 the Four Power Commission found out that nearly 50 percent of the population favored union with Ethiopia. Two years later the U.N. Commission of Enquiry visited Eritrea and submitted a majority and minority report. The majority report suggested that Eritrea be united with Ethiopia; the minority report advised independence after a period of trusteeship. It is extremely difficult to dismiss altogether, as Bereket has done, the fact that the Eritrean people expressed their political will twice in less than two years.

Sherman's interpretation is on the whole better balanced. Although he, too, failed to appreciate the characteristics of Ethiopian nationalism that found its expression in the Unionist Party, he appears to argue that the Eritreans played an important role in shaping their future. After commenting on the findings of the Four Power Commission on Eritrea in which 44.8 percent voted for union with Ethiopia, Sherman concluded that 'the population had divided its support in terms of geography and religion' (p. 21).

The 1941-51 period is treated in Pool's third chapter, in which the author's objectivity is compromised. Towards the end of 1948, Britain and Italy reached an understanding that came to be knw n as the Bevin-Sforza agreement on the disposal of Italian colonies whereby Eritrea was to be partitioned between the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and Ethiopia. Pool writes that the 'Eritrean clauses of the Agreement were rejected by the General Assembly of the U.N.' (p. 21). This, in fact, is not true. Before the Bevin-Sforza package was rejected, the U.N. General Assembly did vote on the Eritrean clauses of the Agreement. The partition of Eritrea was approved by 37 votes to 11 with 10 abstentions.[17]

The rest of Pool's chapter is devoted to British intentions regarding the partitioning of Eritrea and the Unionist activities inspired and financed by Ethiopia. Once again, Trevaski's book is used to demonstrate that 'every village in (the Eritrean highlands) had become the centre of Ethiopian nationalism' (p. 22), and later to describe the Unionists as 'mostly aspirants to chieftainships, chiefs and headmen who had been deposed by the British and the Italians' (p. 23). The contradictory statements of Trevaskis are not thoroughly examined. The 'foreign inspiration' syndrome is fully subscribed to when Pool concludes that it was 'Ethiopia, unrestrained by her British ally, that for her own purposes had been able to establish and foment the very state of internal insecurity which proved so vital in deciding the future of Eritrea' (p. 29). There are several questions that need to be raised in regard to such conclusions. Why did the British fail to conceive of an Eritrean nation, since decolonization was on the international agenda by the end of 1947? Why were the British unable to restrain Ethiopia from fomenting internal insecurity? If every village had become a center of Ethiopean nationalism, how can we sustain the argument that the Unionist movement was solely Addis Abeba's tool? Could not one equally argue that Britain, economically and militarily unable to suppress a popular (unionist) movement, found it convenient to find a culprit in Ethiopia? Trevaskis, it should be noted, had the task of defending British policy or its absence in the region!

With the exception of Sherman, both Bereket and Pool have put undue emphasis on the role of external forces. From the sources that are available to date, their position is hard to sustain. The crucial steps for the federation were taken by the Eritreans themselves. Ethiopian claims, based on questionable historical assertions, were only given the benefit of consideration by the U.N. Commission of Enquiry's terms of reference. It is most probable that Ethiopia actively aided those political forces that were campaigning for complete union. Britain had from the beginning made its intentions about partition well known. The extent to which Britain undermined 'Eritrean nationalism and incipient nationalism', cannot be known. The final decision to federate Eritrea was taken

by the U.N. General Assembly on the basis of reports submitted to it by its commission of Enquiry. The alleged conspiracy of the U.S. influencing the outcome of the U.N.'s decision is unduly exaggerated. Neither the U.S. nor the U.N. General Assembly had other suitable alternatives. Federation appeared to have been the only solution to the irreconcilable political positions in Eritrea.

The Aftermath

After 1952, the Eritrean people, like the rest of Ethiopia's no less than seventy nationalities, were subjected to a common rule from Addis Ababa. The main characteristic of this period, repeatedly mentioned by the Eritrean Fronts and reiterated by Basil Davidson, was the imposition of Amhara culture. Whereas Abyssinian rule over the southern parts of Ethiopia was accompanied by considerable confiscation of land, nothing of this sort took place in Eritrea. The Eritreans continued to possess their land and country. Economically, Eritrea's infrastructure continued to grow despite unsubstantiated claims that Addis Ababa tried to discriminate against the ex-colony. Sherman, who devotes some attention to the period after 1952, has been less critical of the sources that were made available to him by the Fronts. While discussing the economy of Eritrea vis-a-vis Ethiopia, he wrote that by 1974, 35 percent of all industrial activity occurred in Eritrea (p. 111). Several pages later he paraphrased the allegation of the Eritrean Fronts and states that, 'what was once a modestly productive light industrial economy has in the 1970's been almost totally dismantled by the Ethiopian government' (p. 118). On the contrary, according to the appraisal of the ELF, most of Ethiopia's domestic capital was invested in Eritrea.[18] Ethiopia's alleged attempt to create industrial centers in the central region of the country had not, by 1974, succeeded.

What in fact happened was that the Eritrean economy found a huge hinterland in Eritrea. Politically, Eritrea was by far the best represented region in the Addis Ababa government.[19] In the field of education, Eritrea continued to produce about 20 percent of all secondary school students and about 25 percent in the higher institutions, but Eritrea lost its autonomy, and the federation was dismantled. In African and third world countries such a trend towards centralization appeared to be inevitable. This does not mean, however, that the Eritreans or any other group had to resign themselves to the inevitability of despotism. The Eritreans are, in fact, to be credited for their militant opposition to autocracy. What the authors under review failed to do was to examine critically the allegations of the fronts that they wage and an anti-colonial struggle. A critical examination could have provided valuable insight not only into the class basis of those who wish to pursue the 'anti-colonial' line but also into the possible solution to the 'longest war in Africa'. Conversely, uncritical rehearsal of the Eritrean position subverts ideological clarity and any logical thinking about resolving the conflict.

The practice of the Eritrean Fronts strongly suggests that the characterization of the struggle as anti-colonial or against Ethiopian autocracy is closely related to Eritrea's internal class struggle and ideological orientation. Since 1970, the ELF has consistently maintained that the Eritrean bourgeoisie - a vaguely de-

fined group that at times included most of the c. 300,000 Eritreans gainfully employed in Ethiopia - has become an integral part of the Ethiopian ruling class. 20) In its political programme adopted in May 1975, the ELF clarified its position further and wrote that:

> The Eritrean bourgeoisie composed of comprador and bureaucratic-military capitalists... are not limited to Eritrea: there are hundreds of Eritreans who have deep roots in Ethiopia and who have carved out a bourgeois existance at all levels of Ethiopian state and society. These two strands of Eritrean bourgeoisie (those in Eritrea and Ethiopia) are developing into a powerful, coherent class; allied to the bourgeoisie of other nationalities in a Grand Alliance of the bourgeoisie. Strictly speaking, therefore, there is no Eritrean national bourgeoisie. The Eritrean bourgeoisie has in fact become part of the Ethiopian bourgeoisie. They are, therefore, hostile to the idea of Eritrean national independence (pp. 27-28).

It is difficult to assess the extent to which the ELF is aware of the implications of this position. On the one hand, owing to its social base - in those parts which had least affinity with Ethiopia - the ELF alleges that it is waging an 'anti-colonial war.' On the other hand, it appears to maintain that the conflict is essentially that between the 'Grand Alliance of the Bourgeoisie' and the exploited classes.

It is perhaps within the EPLF that the features of internal class struggle and ideological orientation find their clear expression. The ex-ELF members who in 1970 formed the EPLF were undecided as to the nature of their struggle. In the first few years, there was plenty of room for clarification and elaboration. During the period of indecision, which was characterized by populist tendencies, a substantial number of educated and politically conscious Eritreans, mainly from the Ethiopian student movement, joined EPLF. In 1973, the front experienced a political crisis of several month's duration which later came to be explained as liberalist and/or ultra-leftist! The overriding concerns were the organizational structure and scope of the struggle. Those who are now stigmatized as ultraleftists supported the establishment of a democratic organization. 21) More importantly, they campaigned for an EPLF that would unite all the exploited classes in Ethiopia against the autocratic regime in Addis Ababa. The crisis appeared to be resolved in 1974 with the success of the ex-ELF hard-core, who ever since have constituted the leadership of the EPLF.

Ideological problems arose again in 1976 when the EPLF extended its operation to the Tigray border. The Marxist elements, most of whom joined the EPLF between 1974-76, advocated the establishment of a strategic, as opposed to tactical alliance, with the people of Tigray. The extent and nature of the subsequent ideological argument is not fully known, since the EPLF, like any other highly centralized organization, has become efficient in the control and distribution of information. However, there is substantial truth in the allegation that about two hundred EPLF members were either incarcerated or killed. 22) In the ensuing years (1976-78), when Ethiopia appeared on the verge of disintegration and Eritrean independence withing sight, the nationalist group within the EPLF could quite easily consolidate its ideological position and continue to characterize the struggle as 'anti-colonial'.

One of the most important consequences that emerges out of the 'anti-colonial' characterization is the call for the immediate independence of Eritrea. Nothing short of independence is acceptable in a conflict between colonizer and colonized. The evidence for anti-colonial nature of the Eritrean struggle is based on misconstrued and unconvincing historical interpretations and unsubstantiated assertions. Their uncritical reiteration hinders the process of compromise necessary to resolve the conflict between the fronts and Ethiopia. Critical work has hardly begun, even if the curtain of silence of the issues around the Eritreo-Ethiopian conflict has finally been lifted. It is to be hoped that many more veterans and new students will objectivize the issues that have been treated by Sherman, Pool, Bereket, Davidson and others and permit educated observers to replace mystification with truth.

FOOTNOTES

1. ELF, Foreign Information Centre, Beijrut, **The Eritrean Newsletter,** Anniversary Issue, September, 1981. EPLF, **Eritrea: A Victim of U.N. Violation and Ethiopian Agression**, 1971. EPLF, **Memorandum: The National Question in Eritrea**, April 1978. Association of Eritrean Students in North America, **In Defence of the Eritrean Revolution**, New York, 1978.

2. The right to self-determinatin is an additional legitimating factor for the existence of the fronts. It would require a long commentary to point out the extent to which this concept is misused and misinterpreted. The complexity of the concept is discussed at a level of theory by Michael Löwy, "Marxists and the National Question," **New Left Review**, 96 (1978), pp. 81-100, and at that of practice by Ian Goodard, "The National Question in Independent Africa," **Horn of Africa**, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1978, pp. 51-59. In a memorandum submitted to the Socialist Party of the German Democratic Republic in 1978, the EPLF tried to show through liberal use of Marxist terminology that it is socialist-oriented. However, in a recent article by a member of the EPLF Central Committee, the organization was portrayed as a front singlehandedly fighting Soviet intervention in the Horn of Africa. Nothing was said about its socialist nature. A.M. Kahsai, "The Eritrean Struggle in Historical Perspective," **Islamic Defence Review**, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1980, pp. 7-13.

3. Davidson, B., "Eritrea: An Historical note," in **Behind the War in Eritrea**, p. 15.

4. The writings of B. Davidson could be roughly grouped into three categories: African colonial and pre-colonial history, the ex-Portuguese territories and their struggle for liberation, and political strategies of independent states and liberation movements. Davidson wrote and continues to write a series of books on modern African history. The models for resolving neo-colonialism form a central theme in his latest writings. In view of the disintegration of PAGIC (Nov. 1980) and the failure of Guinea Bissau to resolve a basic development contradiction, i.e. between the city and the countryside, it appears that Davidson has either not told us the whole truth about liberation movements or he has greatly idealized their potential.

5. A few of the standard works that deal with the political history of the Ethiopian region are: M. Abir, **The Era of the Princes**, London, 1968. S. Longrigg, **Eritrea: A Short Story**, Oxford, 1945. H. Marcus, **The Life and Times of Menilek, 1814-1913**, Oxford, 1975. S. Rubenson, **The Survival of Ethiopian Independence**, London, 1976. G.S. Zewde, **Yohannes IV: A Political Biography**, Oxford, 1975.

6. Conti Rossini, C., **Italia ed Etiopia dal Trattato D'Uccialli alla Battaglia di Adua**, Rome, 1935, pp. 2-6. S. Rubenson, **Survival**, pp. 380-81. R. Battaglia, **La Prima Guerra d'Africa**, Turin, 1957.

7. Cf. Greenfield, R., "Pre-colonial and Colonial History," in **Behind the War in Eritrea**, p. 24.

8. Trevaskis, G.K.N., **Eritrea: A Colony in Transition**, Oxford, 1960, reprinted 1975, Chapters 2 and 3.

9. The Eritrean Assembly continued to apply preventive detention inherited from the Italian period.

10. Kolmodin, J., **Traditiones de Tsazzega et Hazzega**, Rome, 1912.

11. Rubenson, S., **Survival**, p. 387.

12. Longrigg, S., **Eritrea: A Short History**, p. 169.

13. Alvarez, Francisco, **The Prester John of the Indies: A true Relation of the lands of Prester John being the narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Ethiopia in 1520**, revised and edited by C.F. Beckingham, and G.W.B. Huntingford, Cambridge, 1961, Vol. 1, pp. 98-117; Vol. 2, p. 469.

> The lordship of the Barnagais is like this: its title is that of a king, because Nagais means king, and bar means sea, so Barnagais means King of the Sea. (King of the land by the Sea or Medri Bahri.) When they give him the rulership, they give him a crown of gold on his head, but it does not last longer than Prester John pleases. Alvarez, ibid., p. 114.

Foster, W., ed., **The Red Sea and Adjacent Countries at the Close of the Seventeenth Century**, London, 1949, p. 125. Manuel de Almeida, **Some Records of Ethiopia, 1593-1646, Being extracts from The History of High Ethiopian or Abassia**, translated and edited by C.F. Beckingham, and G.W.B. Huntingford, London, 1954, pp. 8-14. James Bruce of Kinnard, Esq. F.R.S., **Travels to Discover the Sources of the Nile in the Years 1768-1773**, Edinburgh, 1790, Vol. 3, Book 5.

14. Battistella, Giacomo, **Il Credito Agrario e Fondiario in Africa**, Tripoli, 1941, Vol. 1, pp. 212-3.

15. Leonard, R., "European Colonization and the Socio-economic Integration of Eritrea," a paper read to the Permanent People's Tribunal on the Eritrean Question, Milan, April 1980. The author discussed the development of the colonial economy in four phases, and tried to establish the complete integration of the Eritrean people as a political community. The impact of colonial economic integration on the political integration of the Eritrean people is, however, assumed and not demonstrated.

16. Bereket, H.S., "From British Rule to Federation and Annexation," in **Behind the War in Eritrea**, pp. 37-38.

17. Trevaskis, G.K.N., op.cit., p. 93.

18. The First Eritrean National Congress of the ELF: **The Programme of the Eritrean Revolution**, 1971, p. 9.

19. Clapham, C., **Haile Selassie's Government**, London, 1969.

> Eritrea has nevertheless been by far the best represented of the provinces outside of Shoa, and sharp rises in the number of Eritrean high officials in the central government have followed both the Federation in 1952, and its ending with the incorporation of Eritrea into ordinary administrative system 10 years later. This has been partly due to the higher economic development in Eritrea than elsewhere in the Empire, with a consequently higher number of qualified Eritreans, and the steady migration of Eritreans to Addis Ababa. (p. 76)

20. **The Programme of Eritrean Revolution**, 1971, pp. 6-7.

21. Sherman's diligent efforts to know more about the 1973-crisis could not go beyond the official EPLF description that this group, 'believing itself to be more leftist than the EPLF leadership, challenged a number of EPLF structures and operations as early as 1971,' p. 64. Sherman noted that the group was liquidated. Ibid.

22. Africa Confidential 18, 1977, p. 3. R. Sherman, **Eritrea: The Unfinished Revolution**, p. 64.

ITALIAN COLONIALISM AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURES: A REVIEW ARTICLE

I. Taddia, "Le trasformazioni della proprieta Terreira nell'alto-piano Eritreo in periodo coloniale (1890-1940)," in A.M. Gentili, et.al., **Africa come storia**, Milano, 1980, pp. 275-292; I. Taddia, "sulla politica della terra nella colonia Eritrea (1890-1950)," in **Rivista di storia contemporanea**, (1984): 1., pp. 43-78; J. Gebre-Medhin, "European Colonial Rule and the Transformation of Eritrean Rural Society," in **Horn of Africa**, 6(1983):2, pp. 50-60.

Taddia's study (1980) begins with a rather exhaustive reconstruction of pre-colonial land tenure systems based on the works of Pollera (1913) and Nadel (1946).[1] Working within a well defined colonial chronology, Taddia argued that the alienation of land carried out by the colonial state in Eritrea initiated a process of differentiation within the Eritrean peasant society. Furthermore, alienation of land resulted in the destruction of risti as it had existed on the eve of the colonial period (p. 284). Taddia appeared to maintain this position even though, a few paragraphs later, she discussed the reversal of colonial land alienation policy. Between 1893 and 1895, the Italians had expropriated over four hundred thousand acres, although the amount effectively alienated never surpassed 6500 acres or c. two percent of the cultivated land.[2] Eritrean peasants continued to cultivate the legally expropriated lands largely because the colonial state had neither the means nor the interest to alienate effectively all the legally expropriated lands.[3] The land law of 1909 revoked the earlier land alienation decrees by recognizing the primary rights of Eritrean peasants and the law of 1926 went even further in affirming that the land rights of Eritrean peasants were inalienable.[4] The latter law (1926) froze alienated land to 4566 acres and specifically prohibited further alienation of land in the Eritrean highlands.[5] Assessing the law of 1926, Taddia wrote that, although the pre-colonial tenure systems were left intact throughout the colonial period, colonialism nevertheless modified profoundly the social structures of production and the method of cultivation (pp. 287-288). The transfer from concession rights to private property rights in the European sense of the concept which the Italian colonist enjoyed, the side by side existence of pre-colonial and modern (capitalist) system of cultivation and the resultant 'reciprocal transformation' are cited to demonstrate the impact of the colonial period. Taddia then proceeded to assess the impact of the colonial policies of the 1930's, the salient features of which were: 1) efforts to maintain as well as extend pre-colonial tenure systems, namely that of the dessa system,[6] which the Italians found preferable for political and administrative reasons; 2) efforts to discourage Italian colonist settlement in the highlands mainly through the legislation of 1926; and finally, the introduction of coffee cultivation and the restructuring of land tenure that followed from it (pp. 286-287).

In 1931 the colonial state decreed that 5000 acres located on the eastern edges of the Eritrean highlands (*pendici orientale)* were to be set aside for Italian and Eritrean concessionaries who had the possibility to pursue the cultivation of coffee. Between 1931 and 1936 there were about a hundred Eritrean coffee cultivators and about half a dozen Italians who altogether cultivated c. 500 acres of c. ten percent of the reserved lands.7) With the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, the colonial state lost interest in the experiment (since coffee could be produced at lower cost in Ethiopia) and the Eritrean coffee cultivators reverted to cereal production (p. 291). For Taddia, the granting of concession to Eritreans with the possibility of converting the concession into private property and the experiment that followed had far-reaching impact. Coffee cultivation signalled the birth of an Eritrean rural employer as well as wage labourer. This new phenomenon produced a rupture in the traditional social structure and mode of production (p. 291).

Taddia's intention, as the title illustrated, was to document the transformation in tenure systems of the Eritrean highlands brought by Italian colonialism. While I fully concur with Taddia on the changes introduced during the colonial period, I fail to see how the modest impact discussed by Taddia can amount to a transformation of tenure systems. A tenure system is said to have undergone a transformation only when it is completely substituted by another system. The conversion of concession lands to private property, as far as the Eritrean highlands were concerned, were limited to Italian colonists. There was no case of an Eritrean peasant who converted his dessa or tselmi into private ownership with unlimited right of disposal. By granting to its citizens an absolute form of proprietorship from alienated lands, the colonial state created an enclave of a capitalist mode of production employing salaried labour. In 1937, a few years before the demise of Italian colonialism, the agricultural capitalist sector employed little under two thousand permanent and seasonal labourers throughout Eritrea.8) The emergence of a rural salaried labour force was more a result of the penetration of capital, a typical phenomenon of colonial societies, rather than a new innovation introduced into the Eritrean social structures of production.

The second article differs in detail from the first because of the use of additional material and the inclusion of the British period, i.e., 1941-1950. Taddia's thesis on 'qualitative transformation' hinges on the coffee cultivation experiment which she described as a phenomenon of great importance (p. 65). However, the spin-off effect of the experiment and the experiment itself produced extremely modest results. As late as 1947, only 145 Eritreans were officially engaged in (commercial) coffee cultivation, each possessing a maximum of five acres (p. 64). Indeed, the extension of concession and property rights to Eritreans in the eastern edges *(pendici orientale)* and the slow growth of the rural labour force produced a number of micro-modifications: namely, peasant differentiation, the birth of a labour force, and the tendency for the evolution of private ownership of land (pp. 66-67). And the author is on solid ground concerning the consequences of the colonial land policy of the 1930's. Where I disagree strongly is concerning the interpretations that the author drew from the colonial impact. The author wrote that, even if from the view of production and development the colonial performance was modest, the process of social and structural innovation introduced by the colonial system

figure out as the most significant variables. The qualitative transformation and the birth of new social stratification were the prominent characteristics (pp. 76-77). The social and structural innovations, referred to above, it should be noted, were exclusively limited to the eastern edges *(pendici orientale)*. The spread to the highlands was extremely unlikely largely due to the law of 1926. The eastern edges, known in Eritrea as Medri Bahri, were not permanently inhabited. Politically, the eastern edges did not constitute part of the highlands,[9] hence land was not distributed according to the dessa system. The peasants of Akele-Guzay and Hammassien went to the eastern edges to cultivate, but only during periods of ecological crises. The area was not claimed either as risti or as tselmi. Hence the creation of small property owners occurred not in the highlands proper, but on the peripheral region.

Taking the colonial period as a whole, we can hardly maintain that a transformation of Eritrean social and economic structures took place. The alienation of land certainly contributed to social differentiation between those who managed to maintain their risti and those who lost it to the colonists. But the scale of social differentiation need not be exaggerated: firstly, because the alienated land constituted an extremely small part of the land fund; secondly, the impact of land alienation was greatly diluted because the land taken belonged to villages rather than individuals. The size of the rural salaried labour force, c. two thousand including permanent and seasonal, was too small to produce a transformation impact. The colonial system introduced the changes exhaustively described and explained by the author, but it did not transform Eritrean social and economic structures. Historically, the function of colonialism was to integrate the colonies into the world economic system and not to transform the pre-existing precapitalist structures.[10]

Taking stock of the impact of Italian colonialism in Eritrea, G. Mondaini, one of the very few knowledgeable veteran colonial officers, wrote that Italy, more than any other colonial power, succeeded in exercising its rule without disturbing and undermining the Eritrean social, economical and political structures.[11] The changes and innovations which were introduced remained foreign to the Eritrean systems. As an ardent colonialist, Mondaini would have spared no effort to point out the transformations brought about by the colonial process if there were any. He did not, primarily because Italian colonial impact on social structures and method of cultivation was indeed negligible. By emphasizing what she called the 'qualitative transformations' Taddia distorted (through excessive exaggeration) the impact of colonialism in Eritrea.

Jordan's article aims to demonstrate the transformation of rural society brought about by colonialism. Italian colonialism is of considerable importance since Italy dominated the colonial period (1890-1940) in contrast to that of Britain which only lasted a decade (1941-1952). The discussion on the colonial impact is, however, based on a good deal of speculation, since the author did not make use of primary source material to build up his empirical foundations. While discussing the colonial impact on Eritrean labour, for instance, the author wrote that "...at least one half of the Eritrean area was under the legal control of the Italian government, especially fertile land. And it was exclusively placed under Italian

control and distributed among Italian settlers. Italian alienation of land in the highland plateau created such a scarcity of land that the government (colonial state) was forced to increase the dessa tenure system in this region." (p. 51)

As mentioned earlier, since colonial alienation of land, especially in the highlands where the question was most relevant, was limited to c. one percent of the available land and c. two percent of the cultivated land,[12] such policy could not have simply created a shortage of land. There was indeed by the 1930's a scarcity of land in the highlands created by demographic explosion rather than by colonial land alienation policy.[13] The speculation on the impact of the alienation of land continues unabated: "Alienation of land safeguarded Italian interests in settlement and by making land a scarce commodity, it forced landless peasants to seek employment in the new job market created by Italian capital." (p. 52) What motivated the Eritreans to seek employment was certainly not colonial land policy but the advantages of wage labour vis-a-vis peasant farming - an activity which can be carried out by hired labor or through share-cropping.[14] Italian colonial economic policy in general and its land policy in particular, it need to be noted, were characterized, not by their drastic reorganization and restructuring of the indigenous economy, but by their lack of agressive economic activity. Eritrea was effectively colonized between 1935 and 1941, a far too brief period to bring about social and economic transformations.

Expanding still further the impact of this mystical alienation of land the author argued that, "... the conversion of alienated land into crown land and the introduction of commercial agriculture... hastened the disintegration of ... feudal social structures in the highlands." (pp. 52-53) The only way to assess the disintegrating impact of commercial agriculture has to be through an analysis of its spread and practice. Towards the end of the colonial period, there might have been up to two thousand rural laborers throughout Eritrea.[15] Given the amount of land alienation by the Italian colonists, i.e., c. one percent of the available land, and the level of technology of the period, the figure of two thousand labourers or approximately one percent of the population appears to be reasonable. Hence commercial agriculture, in the scale it was practiced, could not have seriously affected the feudal social structures. When Nadel wrote his study on the tenure system of the Eritrean highlands in the mid-1940's, the 'feudal social structures' were far from being disintegrated.[16] In fact, the pre-colonial feudal system continued by and large with only minor modifications well into the last third of the twentieth century.

By way of conclusion the author wrote that:

> The impact of Italian colonialism in Eritrea and the transformation of Eritrean rural life was felt by the end of the war. ... The 1941-52 period, therefore, was crucial for Eritrea as its fate was being decided by the United Nations. On the one hand there was the Eritrean people's desire to determine their own destiny, and on the other, there was the imperial Ethiopian crown's desire to annex and colonise Eritrea. Although the former had the backing of the masses, the latter also had the support of the lowlands and highlands of Eritrea. (p. 53)

I quite agree with the author that the 1941-52 period can be used to study the impact of Italian colonialism on Eritrean society. However, the author hardly attempted to explain the political expression of the colonial impact. In other words, what were the political implications of the social and economic transformations brought about by colonialism? Soon after the demise of Italian colonialism, the Eritrean highland society, oblivious of the 'social and economic transformations brought about by colonialism,' was actively engaged in the politics of unity between Eritrea and Ethiopia. [17] The author blames the Ethiopian Church for the mobilization of Eritrean society along this line (p. 56) and maintains that Ethiopia's victory was bound to be temporary, because by emphasizing such a retrograde idea, the Ethiopian state created a contradiction it was incapable of resolving (p. 56).

Many decades have passed since the 1940's. That Ethiopia in incorporating Eritrea had created a contradition . it was incapable of resolving is a retrospective conclusion which has very little to do with the colonial impact on Eritrean social and economic structures. By the early 1940's whatever colonial impact there might have been on the political domain was hardly significant. The political history of the 1941-52 period was to a great extent played on the ground laid down by Italian colonialism. The alignment of forces, the division of Eritrea along religion and geography and the resilience of irrendentism among the Eritrean highlanders, all tend to indicate strongly that Italian colonial impact was not profound at all. Italian colonialism strived to preserve and not to transform Eritrean social and economic structures.[18] Nevertheless, some changes were introduced, or correctly put, some changes were imposed on the pre-capitalist structures. But the gap between these changes and the transformation of precapitalist structures is too wide to be bridged by any amount of logical or historical stretching. What strikes us most is that, nearly three decades after decolonization, African social and economic structures in general and those of Eritrea in particular retained their pre-capitalist (read pre-colonial) structures.

FOOTNOTES

1. A. Pollera, **Il regime della proprieta terreira in Etiopia e nella colonia Eritrea**, Roma, 1913; S.F. Nadel, "Land tenure on the Eritrean plateau", **Africa**, 21(1946):1, pp. 1-21.

2. G. Bertolommei-Gioli and M. Cheecchi, "La colonizzazione dell' Eritrea," F. Martini, ed., **L'Eritrea economica**, Novara, 1913, p. 384.

3. One of the main issues of conflict between L. Franchetti, the head of the office of colonist settlement and O. Baratieri, the military governor, was that the colonial state, according to Franchetti, failed to keep the peasants away from the officially expropriated lands. See R. Rainero, **I primi tenativi di colonizzazione agricola e di popolamento dell'Eritrea (1890-1895)**, **Milan**, 1960, pp. 124-125.

4. R. Sertoli Salis, **L'ordinamento fondiario eritreo**, Padova, 1932, pp. 56-57, 95-97.

5. Istituto Agricolo Coloniale Italiano, **L'economia eritrea, 1882-1932**, Florence, 1932, p. 11.

6. Dessa is a tenure system of collective land ownership.

7. F. Santagata, **La colonia eritrea d'avanti all'abissinia**, Napoli, 1935, p. 82.

8. Taddia, "Sulla politica della terra...," op.cit., p. 69.

9. See the study by R. Perini, "Zona di Asmara: circoscrizione storica," first published in 1894, republished in 1905 in his larger work **Di qua dal Mareb**, Florence, 1905, where the eastern edges are explicitly excluded from the Eritrean highlands. See also Nadel, op.cit., p. 2, 19.

10. Cf. I. Wallerstein, **Historical Capitalism**, London, 1983.

11. Mondaini, G., "La Politica indigena," **Aspetti dell'azione italiana in Africa**. Atti del convegno di studi coloniali, Florence, 1946, p. 91.

12. In 1910 it was estimated that cultivated land amounted to c. 350,000 acres with another c. 360,000 acres of potentially cultivable land. On the basis of this rough estimation, the alienation of 6,500 acres amounted to c. one percent of all available land.

13. The Eritrean population increased from just 300,000 in 1905 to 617,000 in 1931.

14. One explanation for the considerable increase of population was the migration into Eritrea of agricultural laborers mainly from Tigrai. These laborers probably worked the fields of Eritrean colonial soldiers. See the short summary on the census of 1931 in **Bollettino della societa geografica italiana**, vol. 72 (1935).

15. Taddia, "Sulla politica della terra..., op.cit., p. 69.

16. Nadel, op.cit., p. 20.

17. G.K.N. Trevaskis, **Eritrea: A Colony in Transition**, Oxford, 1960; R. Sherman, **Eritrea: The Unfinished Revolution**, New York, 1980.

18. Mondaini, G., op.cit.; M.M. Moreno, "La politica indigena italiana," **Gli annali dell'africa italiana** 4 (1942):1, pp. 60-77.

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